THE CURSE OF DOONE

THE CURSE OF DOONE

Novels by

SYDNEY HORLER

CHIPSTEAD OF THE LONE HAND

THE SECRET SERVICE MAN

THE CURSE OF DOONE

VIVANTI

IN THE DARK

THE BLACK HEART

THE MYSTERY OF NO. 1

FALSE FACE

THE HOUSE OF SECRETS

THE CURSE OF DOONE

BY

SYDNEY HORLER

THE MYSTERY LEAGUE, INC.
PUBLISHERS 1930 NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT, 1930, BY
THE MYSTERY LEAGUE, INC.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
FIRST EDITION

CONTENTS

SMILING EYES OF FEAR *Page 9*

THE CURTAIN RISES *Page 18*

DANGER'S THREAT *Page 31*

A DINNER-PARTY AT DOONE HALL *Page 38*

THE CURSE OF THE COXONFIELDS *Page 49*

THE DEATH GAS *Page 57*

THE HALF-FACE *Page 72*

THE NEWSPAPER REPORT *Page 78*

THE MAN WHO WASN'T HIMSELF *Page 90*

AT CLOSE QUARTERS *Page 99*

THE NIGHT WATCH *Page 105*

THAT WHICH FLEW *Page 113*

THE TALK IN THE GARDEN *Page 118*

CONFIDENCES *Page 123*

THE TELEGRAM *Page 132*

WARREN MURDOCH SHOWS EXCITEMENT *Page 139*

A VISIT OF INSPECTION *Page 143*

JERRY GOES IN SEARCH *Page 152*

THE SERPENT'S TONGUE *Page 156*

THE WAKING HORROR *Page 165*

On the Bowling-green *Page 170*
Enter Heath— *Page 177*
—Who Shows His Braces *Page 185*
The Woman with the Monocle *Page 191*
A Quick-change Artist *Page 197*
One Link in the Chain *Page 200*
"This Is England's" *Page 207*
Jerry Boils Over *Page 211*
The House with the Green Shutters *Page 218*
The Scream *Page 225*
The Second Murder *Page 230*
Gone! *Page 236*
Nightmare *Page 242*
The Cup Overflows *Page 247*
Jerry Sees Action *Page 252*
Through the Darkness *Page 258*
Forced Evidence *Page 265*
Sir Harker Bellamy Chips in *Page 275*
The Fight *Page 279*
The Barred Window *Page 284*
Neale Announces *Page 292*
The Secret of the Cave *Page 301*
The Sleeping Joss *Page 311*

THE CURSE OF DOONE

HEATH caught her as she was about to fall.

"I'm most awfully sorry," he apologised confusedly; "did I hurt you?"

The girl had gone white, but she smiled instantly. Ian Heath, who moved in dangerous places, and who appreciated courage, found himself admiring her pluck.

"No," she replied, "I was only startled. It doesn't matter—really."

"Clumsy ass that I was!"

Another smile gave him complete absolution.

"You stepped on my foot—that was all."

A cough behind him reminded Heath that the porter who had been collecting his traps was showing signs of impatience.

"You ought not to forgive me—but I hope you will." An impulse prompted him to hold out his hand.

"Of course," the girl said. A small gloved hand rested for a moment in his before she turned away.

"Taxi, sir?" said the porter.

"Yes," Heath snapped. He was vaguely irritated. He could have cursed this wart-ridden porter with the heartiest good will. Why the devil couldn't the fellow have waited? Perhaps, then, he might have had another few words with the girl.

Heath, turning sharply, followed the porter down the long platform. The Continental train, from which he had alighted with such precipitancy as to blunder

heavily into a girl standing outside his carriage, had been crowded as usual, and progress was slow.

At any other time Heath would have delighted in the scene. Usually after one of his trips abroad he was so glad to be back in London that he drank in the familiar sights—the matter-of-fact porters, so different from the gesticulating French or Italians, the dingy railway station, the charmingly dressed Englishwomen, the well-groomed men whose imperturbability was as much a part of themselves as their travelling tweeds and pigskin suitcases, the bookstalls crowded with the latest novels and magazines—all these things would have gladdened Ian Heath's heart normally. God knew he was pleased enough to be back in England this time. That affair in Venice from which he had so narrowly escaped with his life, and something even more valuable—his reason—had been damnably nerve-racking; his series of adventures as a member of the British Secret Service, originating in an obscure dance-hall in the underworld of Budapest and culminating in a duel with rapiers—looking back, how monstrous and yet how real that bizarre affair appeared—in that palace of the Prince of Vantori hidden away so discreetly in the shadows of the secret waterways of Old Venice, had left him spent and weary. And he had little with which to console himself—part success only had been his, even though he had brought home sufficient on which the Chief could work.

After the fantastic and fevered scenes amid which he had moved during the past four months, the green fields and neat hedgerows of England, as he saw them through the window of the Dover-Victoria train, had soothed him like a cool hand placed upon an aching forehead. And these familiar sights had induced a longing for those delights of which he had dreamed

for so long. After reporting to the Department, and watching the Chief's grim features grow yet sterner, he would push along to some quiet spot—Devon, perhaps—where he could drink English beer, fish a bit, golf a bit, gossip with the rustics, and generally relax. He needed all these things—especially relaxation—and he was going to have them. A holiday was long overdue.

And, then, the train had stopped at the great terminus, and in getting out of the carriage he had nearly knocked down a delightful girl.

Occupied as he had been with his own thoughts, Ian Heath could not help noticing how charming this girl was. His job had made him abnormally quick to form impressions; his life had more than once depended upon his ability to read character at a glance.

The first observation he had made was that this girl's hair was of a singular bronze shade; curling tendrils escaped from the sides of the tight-fitting black hat. A word formed itself in his mind instantly; it was "warmth"; the shade of the girl's hair denoted to him life, vitality; it had lit up her face, giving it colour.

Because he had thrown out hand and arm to ward off the consequences of his clumsiness, he had been quite close to her for several minutes. The face, he had noted in that rapid way his life had forced him to cultivate, was not merely pretty in the conventional sense. He had never been attracted by convention in any shape or form—before his groggy knee and jobs of increasing importance on the Continent had forced him to give up the game, he had been the most unorthodox, if brilliant, Rugby three-quarter of his day—and, ridiculous as the feeling was, he felt relieved that this girl was not "usual" in appearance. The impression was so fleeting that he had no time

to speculate upon it: that fool of a porter had broken in, and the girl, embarrassed, had turned away.

Scowling at the porter, whose naturally unprepossessing countenance was rendered even more unattractive by a number of warts, Heath got into the taxi, and gave the address of his rooms.

Tucked away behind the throbbing strident Strand lies the most pleasant backwater of London. Distant only a few yards from one of the world's busiest highways, the Adelphi—alas! that it should be doomed—possesses the healing serenity of a cathedral close.

In the narrow, sloping street the taxi stopped with a grinding of the brakes. The house which Ian Heath entered a minute later was tall and narrow fronted, and had the least pretentious of airs. It seemed to say: "Take me for what I am—I hate show." Heath smiled, welcoming it as a friend. This place represented Home to him, and he asked for nothing better.

From some area steps a face showed itself. The face was like the house, being homely and comfortable looking.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Heath." The speaker, a short, stumpy man of forty-five with comically bowed legs (twenty years before the racecourse crowds had shouted, "Come on, Joe!" in frenzied appeal to a popular favorite) ran up the steps.

"The missus won't half be pleased, too, Mr. Heath!" A broad smile on his good-humoured face, the ex-jockey, Joe Dorrance, who now made a living by letting out suites of rooms in his Adelphi apartment-house, gathered the luggage and commenced to take the bags upstairs.

"M-h-h!"

The sigh of satisfaction escaped Heath's lips almost involuntarily as he looked round the sitting-room on

the top floor. Everything was as he had left it—he glanced, with anticipated pleasure at the fire burning in the wide hearth, flanked by the two worn red-leather easy chairs. There were his favourite books ready to hand in the small case to the left of the fireplace, a round table, already covered with a spotless, white cloth, was in its accustomed place by the window, and——

But Heath did not wish to see anything more; he knew from experience that nothing would be lacking to make him the most comfortable person in the whole of London.

"Dorrance, you're a marvel!" he exclaimed.

The ex-jockey ducked his head.

"Very good of you to say so, Mr. Heath."

"And your wife is an angel," went on the home-comer.

The smirk went wider.

"Tell her that yourself, sir—for here she is!"

There was a tap, and then the door opened. If ever Providence had fashioned a face to match the good-humoured countenance of Joe Dorrance, here it was to hand. Mrs. Dorrance beamed upon her favourite "gentleman."

"I'm glad to see you back, Mr. Heath," she said; "you aren't looking none too well, though—too much travelling, I suppose?"

Heath smiled.

"I've done rather a lot," he admitted. He had been forced to practise an innocent deception upon this estimable couple: because it was impossible to tell them the truth he had endeavoured to account for his frequent long absences from London by saying that he was a "traveller." The Dorrances, who never allowed their curiosity, great as it naturally was about a young man of whom they thought so highly, to overcome their

discretion, had accepted the information unquestioningly. Joe had many private sources of information, however, but what he had learned about his tenant's real occupation he kept zealously to himself. Mary had a real affection for the young man and she would only have worried. Having no children of her own, his wife had unobtrusively "adopted" Ian Heath.

"And now you'll be wanting some food," remarked Mrs. Dorrance, practical as ever.

"Any chance of one of your famous mixed grills, Mrs. Dorrance?"

The landlady looked at her husband, who chuckled.

"You just wait and see, Mr. Heath."

"God bless you!"

The moment he was alone, Heath filled a pipe, and flung himself into one of the capacious leather chairs. He was beginning that promised relaxing treatment.

There was no room in London which could have held a more restful atmosphere. No sound broke in upon its peace. Now that he had reached his sanctuary, Heath should have been entirely at ease; if he had wanted to think at all, the memories with which this room was thronged should have completely occupied him.

They didn't. Through the smoke that curled upwards from the bowl of his pipe he could see a picture —a disturbing picture. It was a girl's piquant face.

He knew now the reason why he had wanted to stay and talk to that unknown girl: it was because she was in trouble. He had seen so many men and women whose lives were beset by difficulties that it had been easy for him to read the signs. And yet what a sportsman she had been! She had smiled through it all—even though he had stepped like a blundering oaf upon her foot.

Heath shifted in his chair. He tried to placate his mind, his conscience, or whatever infernal thing it was that was causing him this unrest. He couldn't help it

if the girl *was* in trouble. He would never see her again, in all probability. She could never be anything to him. And he had just passed through enough worry of his own—he was going to get some rest now and forget everything.

But this trying to brush the memory aside was not successful: for some reason or other—his nerves must certainly be below par—the sight of the unknown girl's face persisted in his mind. Those eyes which had smiled up at him so bravely had been heavy with—was it actual Fear? He had seen so many eyes clouded with terror that he had become something of an authority.

The entry of Dorrance with the appetising meal his wife had prepared roused Heath from his reverie. He was just about to sit down when the telephone rang.

Walking listlessly across the room, he picked up the receiver, listened for a few minutes, and then answered: "Very well, sir; I'll be along in an hour. . . . Yes, I got back all right."

"Dorrance," he said, turning away, "I shall hate to leave you, but to-morrow morning I'm going to a place where there isn't such a thing as a telephone."

The ex-jockey arranged the dishes to his final satisfaction.

"Think of taking a bit of a holiday, sir? If you'll excuse me saying so, you look as though you could do with it."

"Like hell I can"—and then he fell to work.

The meal finished, Heath, with a smothered groan, prepared himself for the visit to the Chief of the particular branch of the British Intelligence to which he was attached. The Old Man, with his hawk's face, was apt to raise Cain on occasion, and he was not looking forward to this particular interview. He had done his best, but one's best was often not good enough for this

terrible taskmaster; Harker Bellamy demanded *results*.

Dusk was shrouding Whitehall in a grey mantle as he turned into the block of flats where Sir Harker Bellamy lived. The Secret Service Chief opened the door himself, and motioned his visitor into an apartment which was half-den, half-workroom.

"Well?" he snapped.

The greeting was characteristic. A member of his staff might be away for months and have risked several kinds of particularly unpleasant deaths, yet even before he shook hands, Bellamy would bark this semi-accusing inquiry.

Heath, who knew his man, displayed no signs of being ruffled, although his nerves were none too steady. Speaking slowly and deliberately, he gave an account of his work in Budapest, Bucharest, and Venice, concluding with the words: "I have already written a full report, sir, which you will be able to study at your leisure." He pulled a bulky foolscap envelope from his pocket and placed it on the big mahogany desk.

A portentous frown appeared above Sir Harker Bellamy's cold, grey eyes.

"This matter is far more serious than I had imagined," he commented. "I must send Hodgson out there at once."

Heath threw his cigarette-end into the fire. "You will be sending him to his death, sir," he said.

Sir Harker Bellamy rose abruptly. His face was flushed with rage.

"Are you thinking of taking on my work, young man?" he demanded tempestuously.

"No, sir—I am merely telling you what I believe to be the truth. This business, as I have already tried to explain, is very particular Hell. Hodgson should be warned that they will be expecting someone to follow me."

He was cut short.

"That is enough, Heath."

The visitor shrugged his shoulders. For the hundredth time he wondered why he served this brute who seemed to have no human feelings. It was love for the work, he supposed; the zest which venturing into the Unknown always gave him. Nothing else on earth could have provided half the thrills; he knew that; and yet he was strongly tempted to tell Bellamy to go to the devil! This would mean throwing his hand in. He would have to resign. Well, why not? At the best it was the most thankless of jobs, this "going underground," and then returning to be cussed at by a bald-headed——

"You don't seem your usual bright, merry self, Heath!"

He looked at Bellamy, who might or might not be trying to pull his leg in that semi-sneering way he had.

Ian Heath drew his chair closer to the desk.

"To-morrow," he said very distinctly, "I intend taking the first train to Devonshire—Dartmoor for preference. There, in the loneliest place I can find, I shall stay a month. No one will know my address. There won't be such a thing as a telephone within miles. Everything having remotest connection with European intrigue will be forgotten—ignored. I shall fish, golf if there's a course anywhere near, eat and drink, gossip with the rustics, and loaf." He spoke with a quiet but very definite defiance. Bellamy's manner, above all the announcement that he intended to send Hodgson, a man of less status and experience, to Venice to clean up after him, had touched him on the raw. He would have welcomed a flaming row; he was prepared to tell the other his precise opinion of him.

Sir Harker Bellamy showed his teeth in a mirthless grin.

"You seem to have made your preparations pretty thoroughly," he commented.

"I have. I thought it all out on the train."

Sir Harker Bellamy rose and walked round the desk.

"It's not my way to waste words," he said, his voice a trifle less harsh, "but I want you to know that you've done far better than I expected in this affair, Heath; in fact, I'll go so far as to say that I don't think anyone in the Department could have done half so well. Go on your holiday by all means. You don't start until the morning, you say—here's a ticket for the St. John's to-night; I can't go myself—too busy—and I hate waste."

Somewhat bewildered, Heath found himself standing in the street a couple of minutes later, clutching a white slip of paper.

He did not know it, of course, but that theatre-ticket was to prove the passport into the most astonishing adventure of his life.

THE CURTAIN RISES

It is astonishing how little can alter a man's outlook. Having tubbed, shaved, and changed, Ian Heath felt a different person. He was still determined to have his holiday, but he was looking forward to it now as a pleasure instead of a duty. The few words from Sir Harker Bellamy, and the brief pat on the back which accompanied them, had made all the difference.

Meanwhile, in the basement of 52, York Buildings, Adelphi, the Dorrances were discussing their tenant.

"Fair done up, he was," the ex-jockey confided to his wife, "and yet now he's humming to himself. Must be in love!" he added, with a sidelong glance.

Mrs. Dorrance bridled.

"I should like to see the girl as Mr. Heath falls in love with! He's too sensible by half to go throwing himself away on these bits of hussies with more legs than sense! You men can't see farther than your nose! He was tired when he came in, wasn't he? Just got off the train, hadn't he? You would have been the same—only worse; why, I have only to ask you to go up to the top of the street, and when you come back you're a-puffing and blowing as though you hadn't a moment left to live! After he had had something to eat, Mr. Heath felt better. And now he's off to the theatre, you say, and to-morrow he starts away on a holiday—why shouldn't he be humming?"

In face of this argument, Joe felt powerless, but, nevertheless, he maintained the private conviction that the young man under discussion was different somehow from the Ian Heath who had left the house two months before with the casual remark that he "might be away for a week or two."

The ex-jockey was a profound believer in the ability of love to change a man. A confirmed (if secret) reader of the type of weekly periodical which purveys palpitating passion to the populace, he had often conjectured when Ian Heath, who was so promising a subject in every way, would succumb to the fever which lays low all classes of the community from kings to fishmongers. Dorrance had even gone to the extent of making bets with himself; he would offer "Fives" one week and "Sevens" the next, according to the signs and portents. Just before Heath had left for the Continent, in consequence of hearing his tenant singing in his bath five mornings following, he had been forced to shorten the odds to 3—1 against. But in spite of this precaution, nothing had happened, and Dorrance had been obliged, as usual, to pay himself.

Joe was torn both ways over this matter. Whilst of the opinion that it was high time Ian Heath had a nice girl to look after him, he would have received news of his tenant's approaching marriage with nothing short of dismay. Marriage would mean severance, a breaking-off of the relations which had proved so satisfactory during the past five years. 52, York Buildings, would know Ian Heath no more—and this was a contingency which Joe Dorrance did not care to contemplate. It worried him. The house without Ian Heath would be robbed of its brightness; even though he was away so much, the place would never seem the same once he had left.

And yet the young man ought to be married, if only for one very vital reason. According to his brother-in-law, who was at Scotland Yard, Ian Heath worked in the Foreign Branch of the Secret Service. Once he was married, his wife would see to it that he gave up this dangerous job.

Before he went to bed that night, the ex-jockey made another small "book" on his favourite gamble.

"I'll only lay four to one!" he declared; "darn it, a fellow who changes as quickly as he did to-night is almost certain to be on the point of falling in love!"

The last notes of the overture died away, and the crowded house murmured expectantly before settling back in their seats.

In his gangway stall in Row G, Ian Heath caught something of the excitement. The society melodrama *Mischief*, as played by Sir Gilbert Mildmay and Company at the St. John's Theatre, was the most popular play in Town. Seats of any sort were at a premium. He was lucky to have been given this stall.

Heath decided to enjoy himself. Nothing, the philosophic cynic once said, is so pleasant in the realisation

as in the anticipation, but whilst he was living and working underground in Venice he had read the rapturous Press notices of *Mischief*, and he had told himself that if he got out of that mess alive he would make a point of going to the St. John's and . . . Well, here he was, with nothing to think about for the next two and a half hours but an uncommonly interesting play.

Yet, as the curtain rose upon the first act—a Harley Street specialist's consulting-room—Ian Heath could have been observed ignoring the stage and looking intently to his left.

A couple of late-comers, women in opera cloaks, were being piloted by an attendant to their seats two rows in front of him, and, although the lights in the auditorium had been lowered, he recognised the second figure. It was the girl he had nearly knocked down on the platform of Victoria Station three hours previously!

He told himself he must be mistaken, that his eyes were playing him a trick, but another look was conclusive: there could be no mistaking that bronze hair. And the girl's profile was equally identifying.

The stall creaked. Heath had shifted his position. His job had made him rather more than mildly superstitious; reviewers of novels might scoff at the long arm of coincidence, but his dealings were with life, and this present circumstance struck him as being slightly more than odd. Granted that *Mischief* was a drama which every theatre-goer wanted to see, yet amid the teeming millions of the Metropolis, it was certainly curious that this girl and he should meet a second time within so short a space.

Curious—and disturbing. It was nonsensical, no doubt, but the presence of this unknown girl was upsetting. Upsetting because he had a presentiment that he was about to become mixed-up in her affairs. Those

smiling eyes of hers clouded by fear—he could not forget them; they had haunted him ever since he looked into them on the platform of Victoria Station.

Little explosions of applause came from groups near him. Yet he could not concentrate his mind on the stage; his attention was still drawn irresistibly to the girl.

He found himself speculating about her. Who was she? What was her name? Why was she afraid? Did she live in London? These queries pestered him. He felt he had to find the answers.

Judging by the staccato exclamations of excitement which continued to break the silence of the theatre, the traffic on the stage was absorbedly exciting, but Heath continued to look at the girl in front. Her white fox fur wrap was thrown back, displaying a beautiful neck and shapely shoulders. Her hair had been tended by an expert. Heath decided that the miserable dread of poverty—so haunting a fear to many women—could not be the cause of this girl's mental distress. She was exquisitely groomed. Vaguely he was glad at this; he could not tell why, except that he always delighted in a well-turned-out woman.

Her companion, who was of late middle-age, was also expensively dressed. Apart from her clothes, however, there was nothing about the latter which marked her out for special notice. Any London theatre performance supplied this somewhat nondescript type.

Again the stall of the watcher creaked. Ian Heath, impatient at what he considered to be his folly, turned towards the stage. He resolved to keep his mind on the play. Sir Gilbert Mildmay was casting his accustomed spell upon his company and audience alike. *Mischief* was a story of modern blackmail. Mildmay, playing the part of a famous Harley Street consultant, Sir Charles Hartington, suddenly found everything he held

dear—his home, his reputation, his career—endangered by the very woman he loved better than life. Lady Hartington had made an injudicious previous marriage; she had believed this former waster husband of hers to be dead. But—he wasn't dead; although a mere physical husk, he came back from the unkown in order to torture the woman who had once believed in him. Then he was discovered really dead—and the circumstantial evidence pointed strongly to Lady Hartington having fired the fatal shot. So much of the drama's action had already been disclosed.

Sir Gilbert Mildmay was having one of his best scenes, but Heath's eyes wandered once again from the stage. The white fox wrap of the girl in front had been drawn round the fascinating neck as though the wearer had felt suddenly cold. Was the play affecting her? Had she a secret in her own life? And was it something similar to the drama which was being enacted on the stage? Was that why she had felt cold? Against his better judgment, and still calling himself a fool, Heath asked himself these questions.

"Nothing that has happened in the past—nothing that you may have done—can affect my love for you!"

Sir Gilbert Mildmay's quiet but magnetic voice saying these words to his wife with a passionate intensity brought the curtain of the first act down.

A storm of applause burst spontaneously from the fashionable audience. *Mischief* might deal with the upper stratum of society, but its story of human tragedy was simple and stark, and held a universal appeal.

In the ordinary way, Heath would have smoked a cigarette in the *foyer,* but now he stayed in his seat. The ridiculous wish had sprung up that the girl might turn round and recognise him. He was extremely annoyed to feel how deeply he desired her to do this; but the same desire remained. He hoped he wasn't

getting soft! Harker Bellamy had precious little use for any member of his staff who evidenced any tendency to becoming sentimental. "Life's no picnic," was one of the favourite sayings of that grim person.

The girl kept her eyes straight in front. Beyond listening to a remark that was passed to her every now and then by her companion, she evidenced very little interest in her surroundings. Had he not looked into her face some hours earlier, Heath—if he had troubled to think about the circumstance at all—would probably have summed up her attitude as being blasé, or induced by boredom. But this girl was not of the modern fed-up type; she was vitally interested in everything that went on around her. Her eyes, clouded by some strange terror though they had been, had testified to this; moreover, her general manner spoke to a body animated by perfect health. Granted normal circumstances, such a girl, even though she might be used to going to the theatre, would have been showing the liveliest concern in her present environment. That she was not doing so was due, Heath decided, to preoccupation of another kind. Once again he was forced to the conclusion that some stealthy but abnormal factor had entered her life.

It was not before the curtain went up on the second act that Heath noticed the man with the curious scar on his right cheek. It was such a scar as might have been made by a sabre-cut. Two thoughts flashed into his mind immediately. The first was the recollection of the bizarre rapier duel he had been forced a fortnight before to wage for his life with that erotic and degenerate Venetian, the Prince of Vantori; and the second was that somewhere, sometime, he had himself stumbled across the tracks of this man with the scar.

Where? He racked his brains, but they would not give up the secret.

Heath's attention now became divided. Although he was lounging so negligently and with such apparent unconcern against the wall, it was obvious to him that the scarred man was watching the girl. The lean, hard dark face was not in entire repose; now and then the muscles of the jaw would twitch as though moved by some excitement. Frequently a strong, well-kept hand went up to the small moustache on the upper lip.

Ian Heath had spent so much time watching other men that he was feeling in his normal element; he was working at his trade. And a faint gleam of light was beginning to play upon what previously had been very dark. Whether he had actually met this scarred man before, or whether he had merely heard someone else talk about him and a fragment of what had been said remained in his memory, the type was easily placed. He might be immaculately dressed (he was), he might have the appearance of a polished gentleman (he had), but to a sophisticated and experienced observer this man stood revealed—he was an adventurer, coolly reckless, a man who played for big stakes and stood to gain or lose much. Heath's work had brought him into close contact with many of the hard-bitten breed.

A man of this class, who might be an international crook of some standing, did nothing without a purpose. He must have an object in watching the girl. Was it her jewels? Heath decided rapidly against this view; apart from a pearl necklace, which did not appear of any particular value, her neck was unadorned.

The auditorium darkened; the man turned away. As he moved, Heath had a clear view of his face. It glowed with a suppressed emotion—possibly satisfaction, but certainly excitement.

Heath fidgeted with his collar. For a hard-worked and mentally harassed individual who, only a short time before, had sworn himself off all kinds of fierce

zests, he was in a peculiar position: he wished for nothing better than to ferret this mystery out to the bitter end.

The next moment, for the tenth time since he had arrived at the theatre, he called himself a priceless mug. To the deuce with girls whose eyes held an enigmatic dread and men with sabre-slashes on their cheeks: what he had to find first, and guard afterwards, was Peace. Well, thank goodness, in the wilds of Dartmoor he would be pretty certain to get it.

He disciplined himself throughout the second act to the extent of keeping his eyes fixed resolutely on the stage. Not once did he allow his gaze to wander in the direction of Row E of the stalls. And when the curtain fell he followed his usual custom of leaving the auditorium to smoke a cigarette.

Upon resuming his seat, he was compelled to notice, however, that the girl was now alone. Her companion, the older woman, had gone. Dismissing the incident, Heath turned to the stage. The curtain rose on a dramatic situation: Sir Gilbert Mildmay, in his character of the Harley Street consultant, was allowing the police to arrest him for the crime he himself believed his wife had committed.

The scene was admirably acted. At any other time, Heath quite possibly would have been carried away. Now . . . he wondered why the woman did not return to her seat. If she didn't come back, at the risk of being snubbed, he would offer to take the girl home.

"Ass!" said a small, cynical voice. This was his common sense speaking.

"That girl ought not to be left alone," said another voice. This was this heart (possibly) answering.

In the end he compromised: he would not offer his aid unless it was wanted. Without letting the girl know,

he would see her safely off the premises—away from the theatre. Once in taxi or tube, his watch-dogging would come to an end. Of course, if anything happened in the interval——

Directly the final curtain fell, he stood up. The girl, walking rapidly, passed him. Her eyes were kept rigidly in front, and she gave no sign of recognition. When he turned to follow, her figure had become lost in the crowd.

As urgently as decent manners would allow, he pushed through the scrimmage. Then the orchestra started to play the National Anthem. It meant the loss of at least one whole valuable minute, but it could not be helped. Standing stiffly to attention, he waited as patiently as was possible. When he turned round again, the girl had vanished. He expected as much; obviously anxious to get away, she must have reached the door before the orchestra started to play and, perhaps, by this time had left the theatre.

Well, that was that. He endeavoured to assure himself that he was glad Fate had resolved after all to let him keep his hands out of the affair. During the couple of minutes it took him to ease a way through the throng to the entrance steps of the theatre, he kept assuring himself that he was glad.

Then, swiftly, his mood changed once again—but for the last time. Now he tried to put up a defence against his being a rotten cad.

For the picture positively struck him between the eyes: there was the girl, white faced, her wrap clutched tightly round her shoulders, trying to pass through the throng—and close upon her heels was the man with the scarred face.

"Pardon me!"

Those who would not give way, he pushed aside. Angry comments strewed his progress, but he had

heard the call to action, and he disregarded everything else. Fool he had called himself for wishing to be mixed up in this business, but he knew now that he had been a far bigger fool when he imagined that he could keep out of it.

The girl by this time had broken clear of the throng of chattering people standing on the bottom row of the theatre steps, and had turned to walk up the street in the direction of Piccadilly.

The audacity of the manœuvre did not prevent Heath from being in time—a moment after the fellow had thrust out his hand and seized the girl, the Secret Service man had rushed alongside and applied a jujitsu grip on the other's right arm.

With a snarl of rage the man flung himself round.

Heath increased the leverage, twisting the man's arm so that the pain must have been diabolical. He meant to hurt—and he did; beads of sweat soon showed on the fellow's forehead. His eyes glared devilishly.

"What's all this?"

In the miraculous manner of the London constable, a policeman had materialised.

"Nothing much to worry you about, officer," replied Heath; "this person was molesting a lady and I am merely trying to teach him better manners." As he spoke, he flung the cursing man away from him. The fellow, catching his foot on the kerb, sprawled headlong in the mud.

In company with a good many other people, a taxi-driver had stopped to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. Flinging the door of the cab open, Heath helped the girl inside. Then, curtly, to the driver: "Get away from here—I'll give you an address later." The car quickly moved off.

"Were you in the theatre?"

An astonishing person. The ordinary woman would have started by expressing fluttering apologies. This girl, looking at him intently, came to the point immediately. He liked her for it; practical people appealed to him.

"Yes," he told her; "I was sitting two rows behind you. I rather hoped you would turn around." Then he, too, came to the point.

"Why did that lady you were with leave before the performance was over?"

"She received an urgent telephone message. It was such a wonderful play that I decided to stay until the end. Thank you for what you did; that man frightened me . . . but"—her voice sank as though she were addressing herself—"I am used to being frightened."

Ian Heath pulled out a leather case. He knew he had not been supposed to catch the last few words, but he had heard them.

"My name's Heath," he said. "—well, I hate to hear of girls being frightened." He handed her a card. "If I can help you in any way, won't you allow me to butt in?"

She acknowledged both the card and the offer with a quiet "Thank you," then smiled. If her attempt to be reassuring was not very successful it was certainly plucky, and Heath warmed to her.

"That brute tried to kidnap you. For a man of even his type to attempt a thing like that in a crowded street can mean only one thing: he must have had a vital reason for wishing to get you away from your friends. I believe he was actually trying to push a hypodermic needle into your arm at the moment I came up."

The ordinary girl would have shuddered—this one nodded.

"Yes, I felt something sharp just prick me. When you said just now, Mr. Heath, 'a man of even his type,' what exactly did you mean? Do you know him?"

"Not personally, although when I first caught sight of his face in the theatre to-night—he was then watching you with great interest, by the way—I had a very strong idea that I must have met him somewhere or other. But I know his type very well—he is of the international crook class."

The information plainly startled her.

"An international crook," she repeated slowly, as though she was trying to fathom the meaning of the words.

Silence fell between them. There was something in the girl's manner which prevented Heath from asking her any further questions. And if she didn't want to tell him, he would not press her. He was determined on that point. The secret of that mysterious street attack was hers, and although now he was ready to help her to the limit, yet she must do the asking. He had made his offer; it was up to her to accept it.

"Where can I drive you?" Looking out of the window, he saw they were now in Piccadilly. Crowds were leaving the hotels and restaurants. Every face he saw looked happy, and yet this girl by his side, who should have been filled with the joy of living, had her life shadowed by some nameless terror—some secret ghastliness.

He gnawed his under lip. Life was far too often a rotten shame. This sort of thing would have been bad enough for a man—but for a girl . . .

"I am staying at the Clifford Hotel in Dover Street," she replied, breaking in upon his reflections.

Heath quickly gave the order, and the taxi took the next turning to the right.

Three minutes later the girl stood on the pavement offering her hand.

"It was strange our meeting again—good-bye, and thank you ever so much for looking after me."

"Good-bye," he said. The wistfulness in her eyes, the drag in her voice—audible to him although she bravely tried to control it—made his heart ache. But she had declined the offer he had made, so he was powerless.

The girl turned, and walked into the hotel.

DANGER'S THREAT

As THE express glided gently out of Paddington Station, Cicely Garrett took a last glimpse of the crowded platform and then submitted her three fellow-passengers to a thoughtful scrutiny. The persons occupying the other corners of the first-class compartment certainly appeared inconspicuous and inoffensive enough, but after what had happened the night before no surprise would have been too great for her. But in the meantime, the elderly clergyman, whose suitcase was labelled "Bristol," zealously read his copy of the *Church Times;* the stout gentleman, wearing the striped trousers and black coat of the man of commerce, was buried in the voluminous sheets of the *Daily Telegraph;* and the middle-aged lady, with the obviously dyed hair, was writing a letter on a block-pad. Apart from the dyed hair there seemed to be an entire absence of anything approaching melodrama.

Sighing with relief, Cicely dismissed them all, becoming far too busy with her thoughts to bother about her immediate surroundings.

She had a great deal to speculate upon and ponder over. It was barely a month since she had landed in

England from America, but it had been the most momentous month of her life. A month of unforgettable experience. First, there had been the arrival at that rambling great house set down in the midst of the wildest and loneliest country she had ever seen. After New York, the wide, desolate stretches of Dartmoor had seemed the very end of the world.

Warren Murdoch, that strange English uncle, whose eccentricities had long since passed into family history, had been kindness itself, however; although she had only met him once before, and that years ago when she was a child, she had taken to him at once. Goodness knew he wanted someone to look after him; and now that both her father and mother were gone—they had died within a few days of each other just a year ago—she was perfectly willing to do her duty by her only living relative. She had journeyed to England, in answer to her uncle's cabled appeal, with that intention.

But she was paying a heavy price; not only had she entered upon a strange existence, but her new life was peopled by phantoms. Doone Hall was a gathering-place for mysteries which eluded and baffled her. So far nothing tangible had presented itself, but there was a hush of fear in the very atmosphere. Even in broad daylight she was conscious of it. The house seemed haunted by the spirit of terror.

Her uncle appeared indifferent to the strange night noises, the frightened manner of the man and woman who acted as butler and cook, and the difficulty in keeping other servants; but this was not peculiar: Warren Murdoch was a man of science, living aloof from, and indifferent to, the ordinary world. Just now he was more than usually preoccupied. He was working, he said, on "something entirely new"—an invention, he had confided to her over the dinner-table, that

would mark a new epoch. She did not know exactly what this might mean, and, aware of the curious look of Neale the butler, she had not pursued the subject. There were plenty of other mysteries at Doone Hall without adding to the number.

Everything about her new home was *stealthy*. Neale, the butler, might be an honest man, but from the first glance she had distrusted him. Either the man was possessed by a very real fear, or he had some crime weighing on his soul. His wife, who acted as cook, was a thin, haggard, tired-looking woman, who seemed timid of being seen, and who always endeavoured to evade any attempt at conversation. Even during her morning visits to the kitchen, Cicely noticed that the woman shrank from her and seemed relieved when she was gone.

And then the wakeful hours of the night! She had never been troubled by nerves before—that was the curious feature about it—and she had a natural love of the country. But at Doone Hall some sense of hidden fear threatened to paralyse her brain. Everything combined to make her feel nervous and distraught—to begin with, there was that gigantic expanse of desolate moorland stretching away for miles on each side of the house—a land of bleakness and cruelty in Nature, ending on the one side in a convict settlement, fearful tales of which she could sometimes overhear from the Neales.

A strange place for a girl of twenty-three to have come to, and, although she had only been at Doone Hall less than a month, she had already been prompted to tell Warren Murdoch that she could not possibly stay—and this in spite of the fact that she had grown to be very fond of her uncle.

As the train rushed through Reading she endeavoured to centre her attention upon the pages of the

popular magazine she had bought at Paddington bookstall. The attempt was unsuccessful; the thought of Doone Hall had made her imagine herself back in that large bedroom in the West Wing, endeavouring to shut out, by sleep, the nameless terrors that besieged her. The atmosphere by which Doone Hall was surrounded culminated and came to a head when darkness fell. Then she would hear that dreadful eerie screeching which tore at her nerves. This might be—as the Neales said it was—merely the wind racing across miles of moorland; but if this was the explanation, why did they look at each other in that peculiar way?

One night, thinking that this uncanny noise must have a physical explanation, she had summoned all her courage, and, leaving her bed, had looked out of the window. It could not have been her excited fancy which had conjured up that horrific vision of a monstrous bat flying away from the house? The creature, incredibly huge as it appeared in that uncertain light, was undoubtedly real. Was it this that had made that weird screeching sound?

She had kept this information to herself. For all his childish simplicity in the ordinary ways of life, Warren Murdoch, like a true man of science, had a brain as cool as ice. He would have laughed at any English bat attaining the size of the creature she would have described.

The steward announcing that the first luncheon was ready, dispelled temporarily her gloomy train of thought. She rose at once, and went along to the restaurant-car.

The food, for a railway service, proved excellent, and a sudden switch of her mind brought her appetite. Opening her bag to get a handkerchief, she saw a

visiting-card. She did not need to glance at the inscription:

Ian Heath

in order to refresh her memory. That fit-looking man of thirty, with the keen, grey eyes and the purposeful manner, had filled a good many of her thoughts during the last few hours.

Until experience in the boat coming over had taught her otherwise, Cicely, with her circumscribed knowledge, had imagined that all Englishmen lived up to the absurd reputation they had amongst untravelled people in the States. She had believed them to be cold, austere, stand-offish, and having a very pronounced idea of their own personal dignity.

How ridiculous was the notion! Take this man, Ian Heath, for instance: although she was a complete stranger, directly he realised she was in trouble, he had given her his card and had made an offer of help!

Why had she not accepted the offer? She told herself she had sufficient reasons. In the first place the groundwork of her fears was not as yet substantial; it was built mainly upon sensitive impressions and vaguenesses, disturbing enough in themselves, but which might have appeared laughable to an outsider—to anyone who had not spent any time within the gloomy walls of Doone Hall. The attack made on her the previous night had been real enough, of course, but even though her case had been strengthened by this happening, she had found it impossible to confide in this stranger. Twice she had let slip the fact that she was frightened, but the moment after she had regretted even this weakness. Besides, it would have been preposterous to expect this man to consider anything

happening so far away from London as the loneliest part of Devonshire.

But although she had been forced to dismiss the offer of help, made thirty-six hours before, she could not dismiss all thought of the man himself. Like all girls of her age, Cicely had formed a mental picture of the man who, superficially at least, came nearest her ideal. Her "favourite" male, as she might have termed such an individual, was about five feet ten inches high, slim and fit-looking; he had a direct eye, was not afraid of danger—indeed, if the occasion demanded it, he was apt to be breezily impetuous, a sort of rusher-in-where-lesser-men-would-fear-to-venture—and he wore his clothes well.

Ian Heath appeared to possess some, if not all, of these qualities. The next moment Cicely, embarrassed by her chain of thought, had stopped pondering about the man himself, and had turned her speculations towards what he did for a living.

This conjecturing formed a very interesting subject for the remainder of the meal. That Ian Heath did not follow any of the ordinary professions or trades was certain; there was nothing humdrum or commonplace about him. He had a very different kind of personality. Heath was an adventurer of some sort; he carried that type of daring in his face. Was it possible—she stopped eating at the thought, staring straight across the dining-saloon—that he himself was a crook? A gentleman-crook, of course—one of those romantic figures of crime which were to be found within the covers of so many novels, and of which Raffles, the society burglar, was the prototype? In that case it might be that he and the scarred man were rivals, and that he had merely rescued her in order to thwart the other's plans.

"You little fool!" angrily murmured the speculator.

"Beg pardon, madam!" The waiter, hovering near, looked at her perplexed.

She recovered herself with a mental dexterity that Ian Heath, had he been present, would have admired.

"Yes, I'll have some more potatoes, please," she said.

After being served, Cicely resumed her train of thought, with the determination that she would not speak her conclusions aloud in future.

She had been a fool to think, even for a moment, she now decided, that this man, Heath, could be any kind of crook. He seemed to know a great deal about the type, however—perhaps he was a detective of some kind.

This new idea gave her a certain measure of satisfaction. Looming ahead was a danger which she could not analyse, but which she felt certain might burst upon her at any moment. When it did—if she found sufficient nerve and resolution to stay on at Doone Hall, a contingency she doubted—she might bring herself to write to this man—she had his address.

Undoubtedly there was danger threatening. As Ian Heath had pointed out, the man who had made that desperate attack upon her the night before must have had some very sufficient reason. What was that reason? And with what was it connected?

It seemed to her as she finished her coffee that an invisible hand was closing about her throat. She looked out upon a smiling landscape, but the knowledge came that within a few hours she would be back at Doone Hall, and then the greyness would return into her life again.

She suddenly felt cold.

A DINNER-PARTY AT DOONE HALL

RAIN commenced to fall as she changed trains. The sun was blotted out by a huge, grey blanket of sky, and by the time the small station, her destination, was reached, a steady downpour had settled in. She tried hard to conquer the feeling, but with the rain had come a depression that brought back all her disturbing fears.

As she stepped from the train, a voice greeted her.

"I hope you don't mind my coming to fetch you, Miss Garrett?—I have the car outside."

She turned to meet the speaker. Philip Voyce was her uncle's nearest neighbour, although a matter of six miles of open moorland separated his cottage from Doone Hall, and he dropped in from time to time. His company, owing to the enforced loneliness, had proved very welcome; yet now, although she smiled, she had an impression that Philip Voyce fitted in with this scene of desolation and shadows, and that he formed part of the network of mystery which she could not solve.

She tried to shake off this idea; no doubt it was completely absurd.

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Voyce, to have come. I should have got drenched. What a depressing day! How long has it been raining here? It was beautiful in London this morning." She spoke quickly to try to regain her confidence.

They had reached the two-seater by this time, and Voyce extended his hand to help her in. Pretending she did not notice, Cicely got into the car unaided.

Voyce took his seat at the wheel and looked at the side-curtains.

"I think you will keep quite dry."

She broke into a laugh.

"Don't worry about me," she replied. "I'm perfectly comfortable." Somehow, the fact that this man was so solicitous about her was vaguely irritating. It was an instinctive feeling which she could not banish. Perhaps it was because her nerves had been so upset the night before, but the presence of Voyce, whose consideration had sent him to meet her, had become distasteful.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to London, Miss Garrett?" Voyce, turning, appeared to Cicely to be looking at her intently.

"Wonderfully!" she declared. "Mrs. Simpson, the friend of my mother's whom I went up to see, took me to the St. John's Theatre last night. We saw Sir Gilbert Mildmay in *Mischief*. I don't think I have ever seen better acting."

Some prompting forced her to assume a light-hearted manner, which she did not by any means feel. But she had a shrewd suspicion that Philip Voyce was beginning to become "interested"—if that was the right word—and she had no wish to play upon his emotions by narrating how she had been attacked the night before. Such a statement might easily precipitate a mild declaration of love, which would be ridiculous, if not actually distasteful. Philip Voyce made a good neighbour, but it was quite impossible for her to view him in any other light. Even in the capacity of a friend, she felt that too much of his company would be irksome.

"I dare say you must find Devonshire rather dull," observed her companion. "Dartmoor is a very great change from New York, of course."

"Naturally. But I am getting used to it." It may have been only another of her fancies, but Voyce appeared to be endeavouring to read the secrets of her mind.

The thought irritated her.

Quickly she turned the tables.

"You mustn't think me rude, Mr. Voyce, but I sometimes wonder what keeps you in this very lonely part of England. You are only a young man——"

"Thirty-five," he acknowledged, with a smile. "Yes, I suppose I can still call myself young. You wouldn't say thirty-five was old?"

She parried the direct question by replying: "Isn't it usually considered to be the prime of a man's life?"

"I trust it is going to prove the beginning of the best time in my life." Voyce slowed the pace of the car somewhat. "You ask me why I stay on the Moor, Miss Garrett? It is because I love Nature and hate and abominate life in cities. Here I have pure air to breathe, freedom in which to move, time to think and write——"

"Do you write? That's very interesting!" Decidedly it would be interesting to know in what branch of literature this man who confessed to being thirty-five, but whose young-old face made a guess at his real age a difficult problem, practised.

"I am writing a novel in which I am trying to give the Moor a living personality," Voyce said.

Cicely felt herself shivering. To her the Moor already had a personality. It was one of brooding horror.

"I hope you won't think I am too inquisitive," she said.

He smiled reassuringly.

"I am flattered by the interest you have taken. I was delighted to make the acquaintance of your uncle and yourself—even a natural recluse can have too much of loneliness—but even before you came to Doone Hall, I found the Moor a perfect setting for my moods and ambitions."

Cicely did not reply. She had no answer ready. For some minutes they drove in a silence that was only broken by the steady spluttering of rain against the car.

Cicely looked at the driver. From the first time she had met Philip Voyce, he had compelled her attention whilst alienating her sympathy, and the remark he had just made about the Moor—so hideous to her, however beautiful to other people—being a perfect setting to his moods and ambitions, was startling in her present state of mind. If his moods fitted in with the Moor as she knew it, they must indeed be terrible ones . . . and what could be his ambitions?

He answered that question for her the next moment.

"I don't suppose I shall succeed," he said; "it is far too much to expect, but I have an overwhelming desire to write one great novel and to see it published in my lifetime. . . . I have taken a big, a tremendous theme, however, and that is why I shall probably fail; whilst most other writers are content with interpreting human beings, it is my ambition to interpret Nature: what Conrad, that great master, did for the sea, I—an infinitely worse craftsman—am endeavouring to do for Dartmoor."

In spite of herself, Cicely was impressed. It was difficult not to be moved by the man's evident sincerity. The possibility had not occurred before, but it now came to her that the indefinable hostility she had felt to this man was probably caused by an innate eccentricity on Voyce's part which she could not understand. She had not encountered a writer before in the flesh, apart from an amateur poetess in New York; but most of them, it was said, were slightly mad.

A new feeling of respect for the man was born. This lasted for exactly two minutes; then she happened to turn in answer to some remark of the driver.

Voyce was wearing a bowler hat. Usually his headgear consisted of a shapeless tweed abomination which she had often thought should have been thrown into the dustbin. It was in her favour, she supposed, that he had assumed the more conventional article of dress.

It was not the hat, however, which attracted her attention. It was rude of her to stare, no doubt—but what had been a suspicion before, now became a certainty. Voyce wore a wig! The thing was a masterpiece of the maker's art, but by some means it had now become displaced, and where the natural hair should have grown, she saw a perfectly bald patch stretching upwards from the nape of the neck.

Curiously enough, her first impression was not one of guilty mirth, nor of pity—absurd as the idea might be, the fact of this man of thirty-five being perfectly bald invested Philip Voyce in her eyes with a peculiar quality: it made him appear to her somewhat unnatural, almost inhuman. In any case, it strengthened the dislike which she had for him.

After another five minutes' run, the car turned into what was little better than a car-track. The last of the Coxonfields, from whom Warren Murdoch, a first cousin, inherited Doone Hall, had allowed the property to sink into a disgraceful state of neglect, and Murdoch was too poor and had been too much occupied with his scientific researches to bother about restoring it.

At the other end of this lane lay a sharply rising bluff of heathland, thickly studded with monstrous boulders. They were now well into the Moor, and Cicely could see all around her, soul-depressing in that half-light, the craggy cairns and rugged tors which were such familiar features of the landscape. Summer had died early on the Moor that year, and the wheels of the car were sinking deep into the sodden heaps of fallen leaves. The squelchy sound went well with the

dismal patter of the rain. After the words of Philip Voyce—words which she felt she would never be able to forget—the barren waste stretching as far as her eyes could see did seem to possess a personality—and it was more than ever like a malignant fiend who, for his discordant laughter, had borrowed the chilling, eerie-sounding wind.

Voyce looked up at the dark, forbidding sky.

"Blowing up for a real storm," he predicted. "Thank goodness you are nearly home."

He looked, as he spoke, at the valley which lay before them. Set down in the midst of this, surrounded on all four sides by rising ground, and bordered in front and on the sides by rows of fir and elm-trees, was a long, squat, stone building, having a tower on either end.

Doone Hall.

Cicely shivered as she looked at it.

Then she turned quickly to her companion.

"I can't thank you enough for coming to fetch me, Mr. Voyce. Neale with the Ford could not have promised a very enjoyable journey in weather like this. You are coming in, of course?" as the car stopped outside the lodge gates.

"Your uncle has kindly invited me to dinner and to stay the night," was the reply. He waited before getting down from his seat as though anxious to get some approval of the proposed plan, but Cicely, in spite of the gratitude she felt at being allowed to reach home without a soaking, could not be exuberant.

"You couldn't possibly go home in weather like this," she replied, as, the lodge gates having been opened by Voyce, he climbed back into his seat and drove the car up the neglected drive to the front entrance of the Hall.

This, like the deserted lodge and parts of the house

itself, was sadly in need of the builder's attention. If she had had sufficient money of her own, she would willing have spent it in trying to abolish some of the gloom which the general air of mildewing decay gave to the place.

Neale, the furtive-faced butler, gave her welcome.

"How fortunate you did not get wet, Miss Cicely."

The man meant well, no doubt, but his miserable drone was the reverse of cheering. She answered him sharply.

"I hope you have good fires, Neale. Where is Mr. Murdoch?"

"The master is in the laboratory, Miss Cicely."

She passed the cringing form of the butler and led the way to the drawing-room.

"Do make yourself comfortable, Mr. Voyce." She motioned to the fire before turning to leave.

Her uncle's laboratory was hidden away in the basement part of the house, and was situated at the end of a long stone corridor. Turning the corner to get into this, she witnessed a very curious sight. A stooping man had an eye fixed to the key-hole, and was evidently industriously endeavouring to see what was taking place on the other side of the door.

The passage was so dimly lit that she could not distinguish the features of the man until, hearing her approach, he suddenly raised himself. Then she had a shock; the prying person was Mr. Moses Grinstead, the solicitor from Tavistock, and the legal adviser of the late Mr. Charles Coxonfield from whom Doone Hall had passed into the possession of her uncle.

Mr. Grinstead, at first sight, was not particularly prepossessing. He was a very tall, stoop-shouldered man of sixty, with extraordinary big ears. These stood out on either side of his deeply sallow face like fleshy wings.

The lawyer coughed somewhat nervously. A faint flush warmed his saffron cheeks.

"You caught me fairly, I must confess, Miss Garrett," he said in a dry, cracked voice. "But that uncle of yours is so secretive about this new invention of his that I—ha! ha!—played the part of a naughty boy. You mustn't give me away though—*promise!*" The last word was uttered with an intensity which spoke either of Mr. Moses Grinstead's earnestness—or apprehension.

"Did you want to see my uncle, Mr. Grinstead?"

The solicitor rubbed his hands.

"Now you *are* angry with me, Miss Garrett, confess?" he asked plaintively. Then, because she still did not make any reply, he continued quickly: "No, I would not trouble Mr. Murdoch—I shall be seeing him later. But, because he might not understand, I must ask you again, Miss Garrett, to keep our little secret." After a long and curiously intent look at her, he turned and walked down the stone corridor.

Cicely, drooping her shoulders—the peculiar action of Grinstead's had added another weight to her load—tapped on the laboratory door. There was no reply, and she knocked again.

After another pause she heard footsteps; the door was unlocked and her uncle stood blinking at her through the thick lenses of his spectacles. Clean-shaven, with pink cheeks and snow-white hair, Warren Murdoch looked the part he played in life—a man who took no interest in ordinary mundane affairs, but inhabited a special world of his own.

"My dear!" he said affectionately, "how delighted I am to see you back! Did you enjoy yourself in London?"

"Fairly well, uncle." She restricted herself to this comment. Although Warren Murdoch was speaking

rationally enough, she knew by his dreamy manner that his mind was still back in the laboratory. In every respect but his scientific researches he was practically a child. She felt she could not worry him just then with the story of the attack that had been made on her, even although the conviction had already formed itself in her mind that it was through her relationship with Murdoch that the incident had occurred.

"My dear Cicely"—the inventor appeared to be trying to shake off his former abstraction—"knowing how dull life here must be for you, I have arranged a little dinner-party for to-night. Mr. Grinstead, the solicitor from Tavistock, and our neighbour, Mr. Philip Voyce, who has been so kind as to look in on us now and then, will dine and stay the night. What do you say?"

"It was very kind of you, uncle, to think of me." She paused, the thought of the stooping Grinstead fresh in her mind. "I have never asked you before—but do you really like this place?"

Warren Murdoch looked as though he had not previously given the matter any consideration.

"Like Doone Hall?" he replied. "Yes, I like it—it is so quiet. I can work undisturbed here."

She did not pursue the subject; it was hopeless. But, looking at Warren Murdoch, she found herself being given new strength and a fresh resolution; Destiny had sent her on a mission when she accepted the invitation in her uncle's cablegram; it was her duty to stand by and protect this man.

"My dear, you are looking very serious."

She laughed.

"Serious, uncle? Was I? Well, I mustn't be serious when I have three men to entertain! I thought I would

let you know I had got back—Mr. Voyce very kindly fetched me from the station——"

Her uncle looked at her with kindling eyes.

"I am beginning to think that that young man is considering some plan to rob me of you, my dear! If he speaks to me about it, I shall tell him at once that I could not possibly think of allowing you to go. I want you too badly myself."

Something moved her to step nearer, and put a hand on his shoulder.

"I shall never think of leaving you, uncle, as long as you want me as badly as that. When I came to you, I came for good. I have got very fond of you, and besides, I think you need me. In any case, I could not possibly allow Mr. Voyce to make love to me."

Warren Murdoch touched her cheek.

"My dear, I *do* need you," he replied, not comprehending in the least the hidden significance of her words. "I don't know now what I should do without you. But I shall be sorry for young Voyce if he takes it too much to heart. He seems a very decent sort of fellow. And, really, when I come to think of it—I am afraid I do not bother very much about anything except my work—it must be very dull for you here, Cicely, eh?"

Her new-found resolution made her reply: "It promises to be enormously exciting in the future."

Her uncle blinked.

"Why in the future, my dear? Are you anticipating anything happening?"

"I cannot say, uncle; only I feel that something *may* happen. But now I must bathe and change," she added quickly, and before the inventor could make any response, she sped away.

All through dinner she had been tingling with a

sense of excitement which she could not explain. The most curious feature about this mental state was that the fear which had possessed her before had now given way to an impression of anticipation. It was difficult to analyse this change, but she felt it to be well-founded.

Now, waiting in the drawing-room for the three men to join her, she had one wish: in what lay ahead she would have liked to have had the help of Ian Heath. A look into those keen grey eyes of his would have given her confidence; the man himself would have been an invaluable ally. She could imagine him welcoming the opportunity to test his wits and his courage against the mysterious Enemy which was just beginning to show its hand.

The door opened and her uncle ushered in his guests. Somehow the knowledge that Philip Voyce and Moses Grinstead were to stay the night at the Hall increased that sense of excitement which had kept her on mental tiptoe all the evening. An insane, but almost irresistible wish was born to snatch the wig off Philip Voyce's head and thus force the real Voyce to reveal himself; that so far she had only seen the man he intended she should see was practically certain. As for that sallow-faced solicitor with the enormous ears, she had an equally impish desire to call him a snivelling sneak to his face, and demand to know if it was his custom to abuse the confidence of those who gave him hospitality by looking through key-holes?

Convention kept her silent.

Voyce, sitting near, appeared occupied by his own thoughts, but Grinstead was voluble; perhaps the port had made him so.

"I am glad to see how well you have settled down, Mr. Murdoch," he remarked; "but then you do not strike me as being a man who would allow what per-

haps some would call a stupid country superstition to worry you."

He had got so far when Philip Voyce rudely interrupted him.

"You're talking nonsense, Grinstead," he said with some heat. "Do you wish to frighten Miss Garrett?"

The solicitor turned to the girl.

"I beg your pardon, my dear young lady. I was forgetting your charming presence amongst us."

The tone in which the remark was uttered made Cicely flush.

"Please do not allow my being here to worry you, Mr. Grinstead, and"—looking at Philip Voyce—"I hope I am not easily frightened. Tell me, what is this 'silly country superstition'? Has it anything to do with Doone Hall? If it has, I should like to hear it."

Moses Grinstead glanced across at the lowering face of Philip Voyce.

"It is not a pleasant story, Miss Garrett," said the solicitor.

Upon the sallow face showed a leer.

THE CURSE OF THE COXONFIELDS

Philip Voyce scoffed.

"It is a stupid tale of superstition, Miss Garrett, and, like all such ridiculous nonsense, contains no vestige of the truth."

"How can you, a complete stranger to the Moor, say that with any certainty?" Grinstead sharply interrupting in turn, looked angry.

Voyce laughed contemptuously.

"Who has ever seen a vampire—in this country?" he demanded. "You, a dry-as-dust lawyer, all torts and cobwebs, ought to have more sense. Grinstead,"

with a rising inflection of his voice, "you're an old woman!"

"Please, Mr. Voyce," put in Cicely. She did not want an open quarrel between the two, and unless he were checked, Voyce seemed determined to insult the older man. No doubt as a cosmopolitan—he must have travelled a good deal and had many experiences before settling down in this singular way on Dartmoor—Voyce despised this gabbling old country solicitor.

"I am sorry, Miss Garrett; I am afraid I almost lost my temper. Not that the subject in question is worth any man losing his temper," conceded Voyce. "If you are sensible, you won't be frightened—but, as I have said, the story is so ridiculous that you will probably shriek in merriment instead of being afraid—so let Grinstead carry on. Excuse me being a trifle hasty just now," he added to the solicitor.

Grinstead accepted the apology, although he did so with a grudging air.

"My dear young sir," he said, "I have lived long enough not to take offense unless I have a very good cause. A few moments ago you were certainly offensive, but I bear no malice."

Warren Murdoch cut in with his gentle voice.

"What do you say to a little whisky, gentlemen?" He rose to ring the bell before looking at the solicitor.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Grinstead, I myself am not prepared to admit that the abnormal and disgusting creature popularly called a vampire has ever been known actually to exist. There have been many stories, of course, from the Balkan States and the Near East, but I do not believe that one of them has ever been really authenticated. Perhaps, however, my niece being present—" He stopped somewhat confused, looking at Cicely with an apologetic air.

"Uncle, why do you and Mr. Voyce try to treat me

as a child? Do you imagine I am a silly, hysterical creature who will go off into hysterics at the mere mention of a bogey story?" She said the words with considerable animation. This was prompted, in turn, by the excitement burning within her. Some secret knowledge had buoyed her up with the belief that a revelation would be shown her that night—and here it was trembling on the tip of this country solicitor's tongue!

"You have known Doone Hall for some time, Mr. Grinstead?" she inquired.

"I was solicitor to the Coxonfield family for twenty-five years, and I have lived in Tavistock all my life. Yes, Miss Garrett, I think I can safely say that I know more than any other living person about this house."

"Then tell us this superstition—as you have called it."

Moses Grinstead cleared his throat before resuming in his customary dry, crackling voice:

"The Coxonfields—the last member of which well-known Devonshire family died last March, bequeathing the property to you, Mr. Murdoch, as being his nearest kinsman—were a wild and somewhat reckless race. Many of them were great travellers, wanderers over the face of the earth. This old house, which was built in the eighteenth century, was filled at one time with invaluable curios from different lands, but Charles Coxonfield, who died last March, had suffered heavy losses on the Stock Exchange, and he was forced to realize on these treasures two years ago.

"An interesting but an unruly race, these early Coxonfields. The line sobered down in the last few generations. In fact, Henry, the father of Charles, was so unlike his ancestors in spirit that he refused ever to live at Doone Hall."

"Because of the superstition?" inquired Philip Voyce, with a smile of contempt.

Moses Grinstead looked across. His dry, brittle voice seemed to break as he replied: "Henry Coxonfield was afraid of the family curse."

The remark was greeted with a roar of unpleasant laughter: To Cicely, through whom a shudder had passed at Grinstead's impressive words, this mirth was coarse and almost indecent. Philip Voyce may have scoffed in order to soften the horror, but his strident laughter offended her susceptibilities far more than the remark of the solicitor.

The latter now glared at the critic.

"If you had lived longer in this neighbourhood, Mr. Voyce," he said slowly, "you would know that this house, Doone Hall, is stated to be haunted by a particularly malignant phantom and that death is supposed to follow its appearance."

" 'Stated' and 'supposed'—both pretty vague, Grinstead," said Voyce. "You must forgive me laughing, but we of the present day no longer believe in picturesquely described phantoms, you know—we have more sense. It's all so much mumbo-jumbo, like 'materialisations' at these faked séances."

"I would not, of course, have anyone take the story too much to heart," was the solicitor's comment to this unmannered attack. "I do not personally vouch for the truth of the statements made by the moor-folk; I am merely recounting the story of the Curse of the Coxonfields, as the legend has grown to be called around here."

"Well, let's have the rest of it." Philip Voyce, lighting a fresh cigarette, leaned back in his chair.

"I will make it brief," said Moses Grinstead. "The beginning of the Curse, according to all local reports, would seem to date back to the year 1791. In October

of that year, one Vernon Coxonfield arrived at Doone Hall after being three years abroad. This particular member of the family had never borne a good name, and soon after his return stories, vague and yet horrible, began to be told. It was said that Coxonfield, who was rarely seen by day, and whose face was always a deathly, unnatural white, could be observed roaming the Moor at dead of night. . . . Why he should follow this practice none of the country people, ignorant, unimaginative rustics, could imagine. But——"

"Please forgive me interrupting, Mr. Grinstead," put in Warren Murdoch, looking across at Cicely, "but I notice that my niece——"

"I am perfectly well—and not frightened a bit, uncle," the girl promptly replied. "As a teller of horror stories, Mr. Grinstead, I think you are splendid! I am dying to hear the rest."

The solicitor looked at Murdoch who, reluctantly it seemed, gave his consent by a nod of the head.

"It was the local doctor—a man whom Vernon Coxonfield refused to have inside the Hall, incidentally —who professed to have probed the returned wanderer's deadly secret——"

"And, pray, what was this deadly secret?" exclaimed Philip Voyce, with a laugh.

The solicitor made a gesture with his right hand. These meant-to-be facetious interjections were rapidly making him lose his temper.

"I fail to see the cause of your merriment, Mr. Voyce," he said severely. "Vernon Coxonfield was a vampire. . . ."

Murdoch started up.

"Was it actually proved?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course it wasn't," scoffed Voyce.

The solicitor frowned.

"Please allow me to continue," he said. "One morning yet another murder was discovered, and the doctor, enlisting the aid of several other men, came here to the Hall and demanded to see Coxonfield. When admittance was refused, they broke into the house, pulled Coxonfield from his bed and killed him. It was the doctor's own hand which drove the knife into Coxonfield's breast. Not satisfied with this, they took extra precautions and buried the supposed vampire with a stake in his heart!"

"Where was he buried?" Cicely, although cold with terror, succeeded in keeping her teeth from chattering.

Grinstead pointed downwards.

"The vicar of the nearest village—Tarpenden—refused to allow the body to be buried in consecrated ground and so the corpse was interred in one of the cellars of the Hall. The stone flags were lifted and all that was mortal of Vernon Coxonfield was deposited at a depth of several feet. In spite of this—" The speaker paused, as though the dread of what he was to add made him momentarily afraid.

"Well?" snapped Philip Voyce.

"I was about to say," continued Moses Grinstead, "that although Vernon Coxonfield was buried in several feet of earth, with heavy flag-stones as an extra lid to his coffin, and with a stout oak stake driven clean through his heart, he has been seen, according to local gossip, at different periods ever since, flying around the Hall and in the neighbourhood."

Cicely clenched her hands. An horrific vision had returned to her. She remembered that ghastly, black, mysterious shape resembling a gigantic bat which she had seen from her bedroom window not many nights before.

"But this is an incredible story—merely some unauthenticated country legend." The comment came

from Warren Murdoch. "As I have said, Mr. Grinstead, possessing a scientific mind I cannot place any faith in such a preposterous tale. No offense, of course. I agree that there are certainly some things which defy a reasonable explanation even in the light of to-day's knowledge, but I cannot honestly place this superstition in the class. This flying spectre is merely a stupid fable—it cannot possibly be anything else."

"I have no wish, believe me, to try to induce you to think otherwise, Mr. Murdoch," was the unruffled reply. Whilst Philip Voyce with his boorish interruptions plainly irritated the elderly solicitor, the refusal of the inventor to give credence to the story was accepted in a perfectly friendly spirit.

"It's just so much eye-wash!" suggested Voyce; "what do you think of this story, Miss Garrett? Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous?"

She calmed herself sufficiently to answer: "It certainly sounds preposterous—but I am not altogether sure that the story isn't founded on something more than mere superstition."

"What!" exclaimed Voyce; "do you mean to say you actually believe it?"

"Cicely!" Her uncle had risen and had walked over to her, concern on his face.

"I wish I had stopped you telling that story, Mr. Grinstead," he said, with a severity that was unusual with him.

The solicitor was apologetic.

"I am sincerely sorry if I have upset you," he said.

Cicely answered:

"Please do not worry, Mr. Grinstead. Didn't I ask you myself to tell the story?"

"And a rotten story it is," declaimed Voyce.

Cicely looked at him fixedly. The fleeting impression filled her mind that the man was protesting too

much. For what reason? Was it merely to get the laugh of Grinstead? But it was poor sportsmanship, surely, to wish to humiliate a man whose years should at least have entitled him to outward respect. Had Voyce taken too much wine at dinner? The only other explanation must be that he was one of those men who found it impossible to keep his temper in an argument.

As he returned her look, she said slowly and distinctly: "I have seen this phantom or spectre or whatever it may be called."

"You have?" Voyce leaned forward in his chair.

"My dear—where?—when?" her uncle interjected anxiously. Moses Grinstead made no comment. His silence might have been taken as a vindication of the truth of the story he had just told.

"It was about a week ago," said Cicely. "I was lying awake. The wind that night was particularly boisterous. It seemed to make a peculiar screeching sound. After a while, I was forced to get out of bed. When I looked through the window I saw something that horrified me. It might have been a bat, only it was far too huge. This Thing—was—monstrous!"

"Where was it?" inquired Philip Voyce.

"It was flying away from the house."

"Flying?" Her uncle snapped the word.

"Excuse me—but you must have been dreaming, Miss Garrett," commented Voyce.

"I was wide awake," she answered firmly.

Moses Grinstead looked up. His queer eyes were shining.

"You say this thing might have been a bat had it not been so large?" he said.

"Yes."

A prostrating weariness descended upon her. She felt suddenly tired—too tired for any further talk.

"Will you excuse me, uncle?—I feel I must go to bed."

"Certainly, my dear. I am sure this gruesome conversation has alarmed you after all."

"No, uncle—really," she protested; but her legs felt made of lead.

Philip Voyce's eyes were fixed on her as she went through the door, and in them was something she could not understand.

THE DEATH GAS

RETURNING to his rooms after the theatre, Ian Heath opened the sitting-room door to find himself embraced by a pair of arms that threatened to crush his ribs. A scent of Harris tweed, mingled with the odour of strong plug tobacco, caused him, puzzled as he was, to shout in return:

"Jerry!"

"Ian!"

Of all the men he would have most liked to meet just then, Jerry Hartsgill was the very fellow. He hadn't seen this old school chum for nine months, and the spectacle of his laughing face, mop of tawny hair, eye-glasses perched precariously on his nose, and the yellow tweed suit hanging loosely on his big frame, was heartening.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded in mock annoyance. These two had slanged each other for years, and part of their friendship was based on violent personal abuse.

"My dear old cock-eyed ass, I was waiting for you to be Christian enough to offer me a drink!"

"Having no whisky of your own—as usual!"

"You heathen without bowels, do you think I would

ever cross your doorstep if I had sufficient dough to buy a drink for myself? Hang you and your fusel-oil whisky! May it rot you and all your descendants!"

"You scraggy-haired swine, keep a civil tongue, can't you?"

Grinning broadly, they regarded each other like a couple of dogs whose growls were not to be taken seriously; and the customary formalities having been duly observed, Heath did the hospitable by producing a box of cigars, a bottle of whisky, and a siphon of soda-water.

Hartsgill declined the offer of a cigar, preferring to light a disreputable-looking pipe. When this was fuming like a chimney, he extended a hand for the man's drink which Heath had mixed.

"Come back with a whole skin, I see, old boy," he observed.

"Just."

"What's the next thing?"

"A holiday." The Secret Service man snapped the words.

"Not half a bad idea. I don't quite despair of you after saying that, because it shows that you are not without the first faint dawnings of intelligence. What do you propose to do with yourself—something characteristically idiotic, I suppose?"

It pleased Jerry Hartsgill, who, apart altogether from being a poet—a rather good one, by the way—was one of the most irresponsible of all living people, to affect that Ian Heath was so incapable of looking after himself that he ought to have a nurse permanently with him. The more risks Heath successfully encountered in the course of his job, the more vehemently Hartsgill protested that he never ought to be allowed out alone. The fact that he himself was the type who would run his head against a brick wall on

the most quixotic of excuses was a circumstance which he entirely ignored.

Heath, for the moment, had been thinking of something else—something in which a girl's bronze head figured—or he would have led his questioner on, and finally got him hopelessly entangled in a maze of leg-pulling. As it was, he simply replied: "I think of going down to Devonshire for a little quietness."

Hartsgill, removing his pipe, blew a huge cloud of pungent smoke.

"What about Dartmoor? A bit lonely, of course, but there's plenty to do if you only know how—tramping, rough-shooting, fishing——"

Heath sat up.

"Let me get the situation clearly, Jerry. Is it your fat-headed proposal that I should litter up my sweet young life for the next month with your gross carcass?"

Hartsgill emptied his glass, and reached for the whisky.

"God knows why I do it," he said in a tone of deep self-reproach; "but as long as I have the power, I'm going to try to prevent you breaking your worthless neck. That is why I am now proposing that for this month's holiday you shall come down with me to my cottage a few miles out from Tavistock."

"Humph!" commented the recipient of this favour.

"You ungrateful hound," blazed forth Hartsgill, "you ought to be on your hands and knees rendering thanks, instead of grunting like a dyspeptic hog. What about it?"

"I suppose I must resign myself to the worst," yawned Heath—and ducked just in time to avoid a deftly-aimed cushion. "All right, Jerry, my boy," he added in a different tone, "I shall be quite bucked to come."

"Good for you," grinned the poet. "My shack is Liberty Hall, and you can do as you darned well like there. It's miles from anywhere, so you'll be quiet right enough. And directly you're bored stiff, you can shoot off—there's no obligation about staying."

"Behold the perfect host!" exclaimed the other. "We'll have a small one in honour of the next four weeks."

The toast was duly honoured.

As he undressed an hour later, Heath decided that the luck for once had been on his side. He wanted rest and solitude, but at the same time he had no desire to be hopelessly bored during his holiday. With Jerry Hartsgill as a companion there was no fear of that. The most lovable but the most eccentric of men: that was the Jerry Hartsgill his friends knew. Even in his schooldays he had been singular in his habits, and it came as no surprise to learn in after years that, choosing poultry-farming and the writing of verse as his twin occupations, he elected to live as far away as possible from the rest of mankind for months at a time. Then, and always at the most unexpected moments, he would descend upon London and indulge in a hectic and sustained attack upon the joys of the Metropolis. Not infrequently these bursts of unrestrained hilarity would end in his occupying a cellar cool at Vine Street Police Station, whence he was generally bailed out, in a state of alcoholic contrition, by his publisher—a grave, dignified person of exquisite manners, who had long since ceased to remonstrate, knowing from experience that it was merely so much wasted breath.

His stock of money gone—he never had a great deal—Hartsgill would don the shroud of the penitent, make a few farewell calls upon such pals as were in Town, and then depart for the wilds again, there to commence

a new volume of poems and endeavor to maintain the World's Egg Supply. It was at the tail-end of a particularly rainbowed binge that he called upon Ian Heath on this present evening.

"Good old scout," chuckled Heath, pulling on his pyjama-jacket. He referred to Hartsgill, whose unmelodious blasts of snoring could distinctly be heard coming from the adjoining room. Jerry, scorning such an article of pampered luxury as a proper bed, had firmly announced his intention of camping on the Chesterfield in the sitting-room.

"You've only one bed, you say, and, God knows, I wouldn't consent to deprive your frail frame from getting its proper rest," he said; "a couple of blankets, old horse, and I shan't wake up before the breakfast gong." The boast seemed substantially true, for within five minutes of Heath leaving the room, the poet's resounding snores reverberated throughout the building.

It had been a long and tiring day, and even before he had placed his head on the pillow, Heath decided that it would not be long before he himself was in the land of Nod.

It often happens, however, that sleep is never so illusive as when one is positive of dropping off instantly. So it was in the present case: directly he composed himself for a long bout of satisfying slumber, Heath found himself thinking once again of that girl with bronze hair.

This proved to be merely the starting point: before he was actually aware of the fact, Heath was mentally traversing the ground which he had covered, in a physical sense, since arriving back at Victoria Station. From Victoria to the Adelphi, from the Adelphi to the St. John's Theatre, from the St. John's Theatre back to the Adelphi. . . . Curiously enough,

the figure of Sir Harker Bellamy, the man who above all others controlled his destiny, never once emerged; his thoughts were fully occupied by the girl whose name he did not know and by a man whose features were vaguely familiar. Principal place, however, was held by the girl.

Apart from wishing very earnestly to go to sleep and forget all earthly affairs, Heath was annoyed to find that this vision of a girl he was pretty certain of never seeing again persisted so obstinately in his mind. He turned over once more with the fixed determination to banish her utterly: it was a nice thing to find himself at his time of life speculating in this madman fashion about a perfect stranger.

Yet there it was: his brain beseiged itself with such footling questions as: What was her name? Where did she live? What had she thought of him? And then—only this question was not footling; on the contrary it seemed to him to be very serious indeed—*why and of what was she afraid?*

Will power can do a great deal—on occasion it can almost work a miracle—and soon after he had counted five hundred sheep passing through a gate, Heath must have fallen asleep. In any case, he remembered nothing more.

Remembered nothing more until . . . he woke up gasping and choking for breath.

For a moment he could only sit up in bed, feeling that his labouring lungs were being tortured by some devilish means. Then his bewildered brain, stunned momentarily by the shock, commenced to function. He reached out with his left hand for the electric-light switch.

Directly the room became flooded with light he saw the greenish vapour which eddied in a growing cloud about him. The electric light gave it a sheen,

making it appear softly glowing—but Heath knew it at once to be sinister, an agent used by an enemy, and destined for his destruction.

Poison gas!

The words formed themselves in his mind immediately. Jumping out of bed, and stuffing a towel over his mouth and nostrils, he rushed to the door, managed to open it, and banged it after him.

"A nice thing! A nice thing!"

Heath awoke out of his stupor to find Jerry Hartsgill, his hair tousled, and a look of utter bewilderment upon his freckled face, regarding him with complete concentration.

"A nice thing bringing melodrama into a peaceful home, I must say," Hartsgill went on, adjusting the overcoat which did service as a dressing-gown; "exactly what in the deuce happened to you, old son?"

Before Heath could reply, the sitting-room seemed to fill with people. He saw dimly the forms of Joe Dorrance and his wife.

One word formed on his lips. It was "doctor." Then he fainted.

When he came to, a middle-aged, brisk-mannered medico, whom he recognized as a neighbour in York Buildings, was talking to Jerry Hartsgill.

"Poison gas!" ejaculated the poet. "Impossible!"

"It was undoubtedly poison gas. If I hadn't made the discovery in time the whole lot of you would have had to take a journey in an ambulance to Charing Cross Hospital. Hullo, my patient has come round."

The medical man walked towards Heath.

"Feeling better, old chap?" he asked; "how's the head?"

"Terrible!" was the reply.

"H'm. It would be, of course. But I think the worst

is over. Fortunately, I happened to have considerable experience with gassed cases during the war."

Hartsgill fussed up.

"Dr. Courtneidge says you were almost suffocated by poison gas." His tone was still incredulous.

"Yes," confirmed the physician. "However, with care you'll do now."

"But I still don't understand," expostulated Hartsgill. "Who the deuce wants to squirt poison gas—poison gas—into an ordinary man's bedroom?"

"Perhaps our friend here is not an ordinary man," interjected the doctor. His shrewd face wore an inquisitorial smile.

"If running all sorts of fool risks is being 'not ordinary,' then he certainly isn't," returned the poet. "But what I want to know now is: Who's the bloke who did it?"

"You must ask Mr. Heath—he may, of course, not feel inclined to tell you." The smile slipped from the doctor's face to be replaced by a businesslike expression. "I am afraid I must be going. Nothing more can be done for the present. I will send some medicine round later on, and call again after breakfast. You understand you must keep absolutely quiet?" he added, turning to his patient.

"Righto," conceded the Secret Service man. Heath had his own ideas about remaining absolutely quiet, but one of the qualities he had had to learn in his daily job was a disarming diplomacy.

Directly Courtneidge was gone he sprang up from his couch.

"Here, steady on!" exclaimed Hartsgill. "I'm supposed to be left in charge, and I don't want to have to account for a corpse."

"Corpse my hat!" returned Heath; "I'm all right now. Did you imagine I was going to lie peacefully

there when there was a case of unpleasant attempted murder to be investigated? You warned the Dorrances against calling the police, I hope?"

"No credit to me that the place wasn't full of bobbies," confessed Jerry. "Mrs. Dorrance, directly she discovered that something had happened to her darling lodger, threatened immediately to run herself to Scotland Yard, but her husband eventually prevailed on her to be quiet. A sound chap Dorrance, I should say. And he evidently knows a thing or two about you, Ian, my lad. At any rate, he knew enough to be sure that you didn't want any police butting in. You didn't, I take it?"

"Not on your life," was the answer; "this particular mess-up is my own private concern, and I don't desire the least little bit of interference."

"Does that apply to me?"

"Shut your face—and wait here until I've had a prowl round the Chamber of Horrors."

To the accompaniment of Hartsgill's justifiable snort of indignation, Heath entered the room where a fiendish attempt on his life had been made. The window was still wide open after Dr. Courtneidge's tour of inspection, and the chances were that the assassins might still be lurking outside. Nevertheless, although still feeling terribly groggy, Heath walked straight across the room. He held a revolver in his right hand, and, although this hand was shaking slightly, he felt he would be able to shoot straight enough if only the target presented itself.

It did not take him long to come to a conclusion. Immediately outside the bedroom window was a fire-escape. It ran straight down by the side of the wall, and he had often reflected that, in the event of a fire breaking out on the top floor of 52, York Buildings, considerable nerve would have been necessary to make

the descent. An equal amount of nerve was necessary to attempt the ascent, especially in the darkness—but this was undoubtedly the way by which the gentleman with the gas had arrived on the scene.

The man must have had considerable knowledge of the locality, moreover; the back of York Buildings was a wilderness of bricks and mortar; and to have picked his way through that jumble in the darkness meant that he was on more or less familiar ground.

The important fact, however, was that the man knew where he lived. That was annoying—annoying not only because he had a deep-rooted dislike to being murdered in his sleep, but also because he regretted the Dorrances having been alarmed. He would have to get away.

Switching out the light, he returned to the sitting-room.

"Keep quiet for a minute or two, Jerry—I want to think," he said.

Naturally, a man engaged on his work would have many enemies. The Counter-Espionage Chiefs of at least three important European Powers, in each of whose countries he had "gone underground" for several months at a time during the past four years, would not have spent any time mourning the news of his decease; neither would they have inquired too closely into the means by which this desideratum had been accomplished. It might be that an agent of that Ace of modern International scoundrels, the Prince of Vantori, a sworn enemy not only of himself, but of Great Britain, had tracked him to London and had done his best to earn his blood-money, but—and here Heath's forehead became puckered—this view did not meet with his wholehearted approval. He hated to think that the rather clever disguise through which he had been able to escape from Venice had been pene-

trated; he hated still more to think that the means which he had taken to cover his tracks across the Continent had been ineffectual. . . .

That fellow with the sabre-cut across his face!

Suddenly, like a flash of intuition, the thought of the man leapt into his mind. Even before the affair outside the St. John's Theatre the night before, this fellow had been an opponent of his. Exactly where and in what circumstances he still could not recall, but at some time previously their trails had crossed—and they had been on opposite sides.

It was but the shortest of mental steps to pass from the man to the girl with bronze hair. She looked innocent enough—and he abominated himself for the thought—but he had known other innocent-appearing girls* who in reality were very dangerous creatures. Their simplicity was merely a clever pose. And that look of expectant dread which she carried in her eyes; what could this mean?

He got up and paced the floor. The problem had changed from being merely intriguing; it had become harassingly perplexing. Of course, the coincidences—the girl being at Victoria Station, and standing directly outside the door of his carriage when he alighted; then her presence again at the St. John's Theatre, and the molestation by the scarred man might mean nothing . . . but was it possible that this assault had been pre-arranged and with the expressed object of ensnaring him?

Heath repudiated the suggestion almost as quickly as it came. In the first place, he was unable to conceive that a girl with such clear, limpid eyes as the unknown possessed was really an adventuress, whilst for another thing, the scheme to entrap him, had it been pre-arranged, would certainly have been better organized.

It came back to the man. Where had he seen that fellow before?

A voice broke in upon his meditations.

"How much longer are you going to keep stewing?" demanded Jerry Hartsgill.

Heath rose.

"I've worked it out pretty well," he pacified the other by saying. "I suppose you don't feel inclined for a spot more sleep, do you?"

"Optimist!" jeered the other. "I like your idea of a calm, peaceful night's rest! But how are you feeling now, old man?—my lad! that was a near shave you had, you know. The Courtneidge bloke was very windy when he first had a peep at you." The poet took his friend's arm and led him over to the fireplace, where the estimable Mrs. Dorrance, who would have striven to do what she imagined was her duty even in the midst of an earthquake, had already got a cheerful blaze going.

Before the comforting flames Hartsgill plumped the other down, saw that Heath's dressing-gown was securely fastened, and repeated his query.

"I'm all right," answered Heath, "but there's one thing I want to say to you, Jerry."

"Say on, Macduff."

"That Dartmoor trip must be off."

"Off? In the sacred name of the Flaming Tin Hat —why?"

"Light your pipe and try to look reasonably calm," said the other. "This affair to-night has most of the elements of an old-time Lyceum melodrama, I know—but the fact remains that some joker, known or unknown, is after my blood. That's all right so far as I'm concerned—when I say 'all right,' I mean that I have become more or less accustomed to little excite-

ments of this sort—but I can't allow one of England's leading poets to run the same risk. Savvy?"

Jerry puffed at his pipe.

"If it's all the same to you, old man, I would much rather be known to posterity as an Egg Provider than a poet. Eggs are things of the body, materialistic things, therefore substantial; poetry . . . but I won't pursue a painful subject. And never mind that now, anyway; what's the idea at the back of this flat-footed monologue of yours?"

"The idea is that I refuse to allow you to run any risk, Jerry, old boy. And so long as you are being seen about with me there is a risk. So, much as I hate saying it, the joint Dartmoor trip must be off—o-p-h, and no back answers, me lad!"

Hartsgill sat bolt upright.

"Let me be boiled in linseed oil if I ever saw such a perishing fool!" he passionately declared. "Let me tell you this, you stale suet-pudding; you're coming down to my cottage on Dartmoor if I have to carry you there! Isn't it just the place for a sick man? Isn't the air supposed to be the best in England? Isn't it so quiet that you'll forget all your worries before you've been there twenty-four hours? Isn't it so lonely that no one could possibly find you, even granted that they were mugs enough to be still looking for you? And supposing this blight or blighters, as the case may be, *should* happen to strike the right bridle-path, am I such a useless hulk that I couldn't put forward a blow for St. George and the Right? Strike me a greenish-yellow shade of heliotrope, if ever I saw such an ass as you! I don't want to sound the horn, but if you cast your mind back I was able to give our pal Jimmy Stevenson a bit of a lift up at Skelt Castle that time." [1]

[1] "False-face."

Ian Heath stretched out a hand and gripped the speaker's shoulder.

"You touch me, Jerry," he said; "I give in. The rest must be on your own head—only I shall insist upon paying all burial expenses."

"Don't worry about that," grinned the poet; "if I conk out, there'll be no coin in the till down at Four Ways Cottage . . . but I say"—he broke off eagerly —"listen, will you? I have an idea."

"Tell it slowly."

"Mutt! Here it is: This homicidal cove who tried to do you in will surely be interested in the result of his experiments, what?"

"No doubt."

"Very well, then," Hartsgill continued, gathering speed, "what I suggest is that in order to put the swine off we arrange a mock funeral."

"A what funeral? Calm yourself, old boy. Put some ice on the forehead."

"I'm perfectly serious—only you haven't the horse sense to follow my meaning. I said a mock funeral and I mean a mock funeral. If you don't understand the meaning of the word 'mock,' substitute 'fake.' This disappointed blood-spiller will be sure to want to know if he put you permanently to bye-bye. Well, let him believe that he was successful. Then he won't bother you any more. You, on the other hand, will have the advantage of being able to worm out his beastly secrets at the same time as he imagines you are dead."

Heath burst out laughing. Then the idea, bizarre as it sounded, struck him as having a certain substratum of common sense. In any case, it was mildly ingenious.

"I don't know what the Dorrances would say if you suggested that a coffin, having a brass plate with my name neatly inscribed thereon, should be carried out

the front door," he parried. "But it certainly would be a lark!" The thought caused him further merriment.

"That's right!" encouraged Hartsgill. "The more you laugh, the less you sound like a fellow who was nearly croaked just now. What do you say about the funeral, though?"

"I'll think it over. Now tell me something more about this Dartmoor cottage of yours. Who's your nearest neighbours, for instance?"

"A deucedly interesting looking girl on the one side, and a swine that I can't stick at any price on the other."

"Seems an interesting combination," remarked his listener; "what's the girl's name?"

"I understand it's Cicely Garrett."

"Sounds attractive."

"Yes; and the girl herself is attractive. I've only seen her once, and then not to speak to, but she's got the most beautiful head of hair I've ever come across."

Heath smiled.

"Is this the Poet or the Egg Merchant speaking?"

"Both. Girls with bronze hair are fairly scarce in this country, and——"

He was interrupted. His listener, leaning forward, was staring at him.

"Did you say the girl's hair was bronze-coloured?" asked Heath. There was a tensity in his tone which caused Hartsgill to stare in turn.

"I did—a wonderful shade. Something like dapple gold. Why?"

Ian Heath rose. An inspiration came to him.

"Let's start packing," he said; "I feel I want to get to Dartmoor."

THE HALF-FACE

CICELY turned nervously in her bed. There are degrees of fear, and the present sensation was more poignant, more soul-sickening than any she had known at Doone Hall since the moment of her arrival. It was as though a giant hand was gripping her heart.

She had thought that the change of going to London would be beneficial, but now she realized that things had become worse in this house of shadows on Dartmoor. The sense of impending doom, of fast-approaching disaster, had quickened. To complete her misery, she was powerless. She could do nothing. It was pitiable.

There was a centre to this web of terror, but its ramifications were so widespread that she could not piece all the shreds together. That man with the scarred face who had so audaciously molested her outside the St. John's Theatre—was he connected with it? He must be—but how? What part was he playing in this horror which seemed to have as its object the unhinging of her mind?

In the thraldom of the dreadful story she had heard that night, she had forgotten this incident, but now the evil if handsome face of the man, with the scar showing livid against the rest of the skin, returned to add fresh torture to her already overwrought mind.

She came back to the present; it was impossible to free herself of the thought that Moses Grinstead had retailed the story of that horrible family curse with quite unnecessary gusto. Need he have chosen that time for repeating such a macabre tale? Could he not have waited until he was alone with her uncle? It was true he had warned her—but in this he had played the

hypocrite just as he had revealed himself as a snivelling humbug when she discovered him, a few hours before, endeavouring to look into Warren Murdoch's laboratory.

A wind had sprung up. It set the window fastenings rattling; it swept eerily down the long, draughty corridor outside her bedroom door. That same Dartmoor wind which had sent so many nervous tremors down her spine. . . . Now, and not for the first time, it seemed to be the voice of a mocking fiend. It took on speech: "The secret! Your uncle's secret! It's in danger!" That was what it said.

The mythical voice was so insistent that the conviction she was actually being addressed became almost overwhelming.

She sat up and, in the endeavour to restore a measure of calmness, lit the candle which stood on the small table on the right of the bed. The former owner of Doone Hall had not considered it worth while to instal an electric light plant; and, whilst the effect of having to rely upon oil-lamps and candles for illumination might be picturesque, it increased appreciably the feeling that the old mansion was full of lurking phantoms.

The candle flickered, flaming riotously one minute and then almost dying the next. It cast grotesque shadows, some of which sent her heart leaping into her mouth.

With her breath coming in short, quick gasps, Cicely looked towards the door. A feeling, so deep-rooted as to be irresistible, made her reach out for her dressing-gown which was hanging over the bed-rail.

She must go to her uncle at once!

That secret which he guarded so zealously and which was the whole of life to him—it was in danger and she must warn him!

The night seemed bitterly cold as she got out of bed and put on her dressing-gown. The candle-flame flickered wildly, on her way across the room. She was afraid of what might be beyond the door, but she had to go through with her task; it was the only way in which she could regain something of her self-respect.

As she stood momentarily hesitant in the long, dark, gloom-ridden corridor which extended for twenty yards outside her bedroom, the door closed behind her. It was as though an unseen hand had shut it. She told herself it was the wind—and yet, because of the wildness of the night, she had not opened any of the windows in her room. What mysterious agency was at work?

She moved on. To return to her room after the shutting of that door represented now as big an ordeal as traversing the corridor and seeking her uncle.

Once she stopped. Through the half-drawn curtains of one long corridor window she caught a dim glimpse of the outside world. The moon had risen, and she could see the branches of the trees in the grounds swaying; the wind sweeping through them made the leaves quiver and shake. Faintly came a low moaning sound.

Hurriedly she drew the curtains and hastened on. She had reached the end of the corridor and was about to mount the short staircase that led to the barely furnished attic which Murdoch occupied (the owner of Doone Hall had selected the most unpretentious room in the house for his own use) when a sound that made her stop once again came from the right.

Here was the imposing balustraded gallery, which, running around the top of the large hall, connected with the main staircase.

Even in daytime, so dark was the panelling and so ill-lit this particular part of the house, that Cicely

always hastened past it on her way downstairs. It had an atmosphere of inspissated gloom.

Every nerve strained, she listened. She had not been mistaken—it was a noise—a stealthy sound like a person walking cautiously.

The fear which had been dormant in her mind now assumed actual shape; someone was either ascending or descending the broad staircase.

That someone must be after the Secret! He was abusing his host's hospitality by acting the traitor! Her uncle always kept the door of his laboratory securely locked, but perhaps this man—was it Grinstead?—had a skeleton-key.

She must frustrate this trick at whatever cost. So real was her determination that she forgot her initial idea of going to wake her uncle; but instead turned to the right and, walking quickly round the gallery, started to follow the soft, padding footsteps.

The night prowler was in front; now she could hear him distinctly. He carried no light for fear of being seen, no doubt, and this fact rather went to prove in Cicely's mind that the man was Moses Grinstead. Who else could have such an intimate knowledge of the house as the solicitor, who must have spent so many hours transacting business within it?

Whoever it might be, she was going to surprise and then expose him. The resolution gave her an unsuspected courage. Her former unnerving fear had largely vanished. She was living on her spirit, although she did not know it.

A sudden breath of wind, coming from she knew not where, blew out her candle; and, although she had a box of matches in the candlestick, she did not strike one. In that dense blackness, the light might show up distinctly, and the man she wished to catch red-handed would be alarmed.

Across the hall, down the corridor which skirted the dining-room tracked and tracker went. It was a grim game; and it became grimmer as Cicely heard the door at the other end creak open. It was this door which led to that part of the basement where Warren Murdoch had his laboratory.

Why had not Neale, the butler, locked that door? That he had definite orders to do so each night upon retiring she knew for certain. She would tell him about it; or perhaps the rebuke would be more authoritative if it came from her uncle.

Absorbed in this thought, she quickened her steps. The caution she had hitherto shown became abandoned; the zest of the chase caused her to ignore care.

She forgot the row of steps that stretched on the other side of the door, and, missing her footing in that Stygian gloom, she fell headlong. A cry she tried vainly to suppress quivered in the deep silence.

While she sprawled where she had fallen, a thin but dazzling arrow of light cut the darkness. It fell upon her face. Then followed the sound of an angry curse in the blackness ahead.

She struggled desperately to get on her feet, in order to be at a better advantage. But, to her horror, she was powerless to move.

The man was unrecognizable. He was merely a blurred outline behind the piercing thin white beam of light.

He did not speak, and the silence made his approach even more sinister.

When he was within a yard of her, Cicely made a superhuman effort, springing up. Putting out her hand, she clutched the man's sleeve. The light turned upwards and a scream which sent echoes reverberating down that cold, stone-flagged passage, burst from her lips.

This man had only half a face!

It was not a horror conjured up by her excited state; her nerves had not gone back on her to this extent. It was a dreadful fact: when the man shot up the hand holding the electric torch, the light illumined his head and shoulders. She was able to see clearly—and on the left side of what should have been his face there was—nothing. . . .

After uttering that cry of sheer terror, her mind was a blank until, opening her eyes in her own room, she saw her uncle and Mrs. Neale, the butler's wife, bending over her.

"Uncle!" she stretched out her arms to him.

"What is it, Cicely? Why were you out of bed?—and in the middle of the night, too? You were found in the passage leading to the laboratory. What were you doing there?"

She rallied herself. Warren Murdoch was the kindest-hearted of men, but even his affection could not overcome the annoyance he was experiencing at what must have seemed to him very strange conduct. There was a slight but unmistakable note of querulousness in his voice.

Cicely looked round. At the foot of the bed she saw Janet Neale. The woman had a fixed stare, and her eyes were unpleasant to see. Her naturally pale face seemed ghastly in that uncertain light.

"I can't tell you now, uncle—but I will explain in the morning." She forced herself to make this reply. To have told of her encounter with that appalling creature outside the laboratory door would have taxed her overwrought nerves to the breaking-point. Although she had paid such a price, her main object had been gained: whoever or whatever that *Thing* might be, it was highly improbable that, after what had hap-

pened, he would make another attempt on the laboratory door that night—for that that had been his object there could be no doubt.

"Leave me, uncle—I shall be all right—really I shall; and I will explain everything to you in the morning."

Muttering to himself, Warren Murdoch turned from the bed. The affair had upset him, and he was evidently anxious to return to his own room.

"Mrs. Neale has offered to stay with you for the rest of the night," he said, pausing in his walk to the door.

Cicely shook her head.

"No—it's not necessary; I shall be quite all right, as I have told you, uncle. Thank you, all the same, Mrs. Neale," she added, turning to the butler's wife. She was immeasurably relieved when the woman started to follow her uncle out of the room; she could not remove from her mind the thought that Janet Neale, with her pallid face and startlingly staring eyes, was intimately connected with the unfathomable, hidden life of Doone Hall.

With the room empty, she left her bed and did not get between the sheets again until she had made sure that not only was the door locked, but that every window was securely fastened. In the circumstances these precautions might not actually afford her very much safety, but yet they gave her some relief.

And, then, because the human mind can stand just so much but nothing more, sleep removed her from a world of fears and sent her into a merciful oblivion.

THE NEWSPAPER REPORT

The morning broke fresh and clear, and the Moor looked fair enough as Cicely dressed. The happening

of a few hours before might have been a disordered dream.

Down in the sitting-room she found Philip Voyce and Moses Grinstead chatting desultorily with their backs to a roaring log fire as they awaited breakfast. Warren Murdoch, she was informed, was writing some letters.

"How are you feeling this morning, Miss Garrett?" Philip Voyce's expression was considerate and his tone kind; "no ill-effects after last night, I hope? I should explain, perhaps, that it was I who, hearing your scream, rushed downstairs and discovered you lying in a dead faint on the cold floor of that beastly passage. May I ask what actually happened?"

Cicely hesitated. Although Voyce seemed sincere enough, and although, if his story was true, he had earned her confidence as well as her thanks, she could not tell him the truth. She could not tell either of these men the truth; that must be reserved for the ears of one man only—Warren Murdoch.

Yet she had to say something. Both Voyce and Grinstead were looking at her so intently that, apart from her secret, she would have felt embarrassed by their scrutiny.

Invention came to her aid.

"The wind was howling to such an extent last night that I could not sleep. I left my room to find if the windows in the corridor outside were all fastened. Whilst I was seeing to them, I thought I heard a noise in the direction of the gallery. Dartmoor, no doubt, is a somewhat peculiar place for a burglary, but the instant impression I had was that someone had broken into the house."

Philip Voyce nodded.

"A quite natural conclusion in the circumstances," he commented; "it was very plucky of you, however,

to endeavour to track a burglar down on your own, Miss Garrett."

He spoke admiringly, his eyes resting on her with open approval. Cicely hurried with her tale; this man's slightly veiled admiration was only a trifle less objectionable than his mystery moods.

Moses Grinstead's dry, cracked voice broke in.

"And was it a burglar?" he inquired.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say "No."

"I had no chance of seeing who it was," she prevaricated. "It was very dark, and, having no light—the candle I was carrying went out—I missed my footing and fell. It was very silly of me to scream—but I could not help it."

Voyce's look of admiration became more pronounced.

"It was one of the pluckiest things I have ever heard of," he said; "what do you say, Grinstead?"

The solicitor shrugged his ungainly shoulders.

"Oh yes. The modern girl is a very astonishing creature." He turned to look at Cicely. "In your own interests, however, may I advise you not to take on duties which by rights should fall either to your uncle or to Neale, the butler?"

Before Cicely could frame any reply to this admonition, Philip Voyce forcibly smacked one clenched hand into the palm of the other.

"Neale!" he exclaimed. "Could it possibly have been Neale? I know it's no business of mine," he continued, "but I have never liked the look of that fellow, Miss Garrett. If he hasn't a secret sin on his mind, he's hatching some mischief—I'm ready to bet on it."

He looked at Cicely as though expecting some confirmation, but the the girl made no reply. Surrounded as she was by a series of baffling events, she felt that her safest course was to remain silent.

Grinstead took up the challenge. "I have known

James Neale for the last ten years," declared the solicitor. "He was with the late Mr. Charles Coxonfield, to whom he rendered excellent service. Mr. Coxonfield always spoke of Neale in the very highest terms. He was an exacting employer, being somewhat arbitrary in his dealings with servants, and I am quite certain that if Neale had ever given him the slightest cause for suspicion, Mr. Coxonfield would have immediately dismissed the man. You have never heard your uncle complain about Neale, Miss Garrett?" Grinstead added, turning to the girl.

"My uncle is always too preoccupied with his own thoughts to bother about any domestic arrangements."

"I maintain that the man is not to be trusted!" said Philip Voyce; "before long you will see, Grinstead, that I am right."

At this point Warren Murdoch entered the room.

"I suppose all you good people are frantically hungry," he remarked. "I hope you will forgive me for keeping you waiting."

Whilst the two guests murmued perfunctory reassurances, the scientist kissed his niece good-morning.

"No ill-effects from last night's experience, I hope, my dear?"

Cicely smiled. It required a good deal of resolution because she could see that her uncle, the one person who should have been impressed, had attached practically no importance to the affair. How little he thought of the matter was shown by his not even mentioning the explanation which she had promised to give him that morning.

"I am perfectly all right, uncle," she declared—and then, Neale entering with the dishes, they sat down to breakfast.

Two hours later Cicely sat in the small living-room

which she had reserved for her own use. Philip Voyce and Moses Grinstead had gone half an hour ago, having driven away in Voyce's car. Her uncle, somewhat irritably, or so it had seemed to her, had agreed to give her ten minutes of his time snatched from the laboratory, and she was now endeavoring to marshal her thoughts into some sort of sequence pending Warren Murdoch's arrival.

Preoccupied as usual, her uncle entered the room, regarding her in that dreamy state she knew so well. He made no attempt to sit down.

"I hope you won't keep me too long, Cicely—it can't be anything of importance——"

"What I am going to say to you, uncle," she interrupted, "is *very* important—so important, in fact, that the real reason why I left my room last night was to come straight to you and tell you what was on my mind. I cannot talk while you are standing; do, please, sit down."

Murmuring ineffectually, Warren Murdoch complied with her request. His surprise was reflected in his face.

"I don't understand you at all, my dear—" he started, but relapsed into silence when he saw his niece's uplifted hand.

"I hope you will understand better after you have heard what I must say," she stated; "in the first place, uncle, will you please tell me if the invention on which you are now working is likely to prove, when completed, of any great value?"

The words galvanized the scientist. He sat bolt upright in his chair.

"If I am successful," he replied, "my invention will mark a new epoch in scientific discovery."

Cicely felt herself thrilling.

"Forgive me, uncle—but you are quite certain of that?" Her voice was very anxious.

For a moment it seemed that Warren Murdoch would lose his temper. But the colour went from his face, and his voice, when he replied, was customarily gentle.

"I am positive," he declared. "But you must have a very good reason for asking me this, Cicely?"

"I have, uncle." She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts. "I am sure that you are surrounded here by enemies," she added.

"Enemies?"

Warren Murdoch flung out the word as though it burned his tongue.

"Yes, enemies. Somebody is after your invention."

The word invention made him spring to his feet. Before, he had been abstracted, but now his attention was gripped.

"Somebody?" he demanded. "Whom do you mean by somebody?"

Cicely temporised. It was too early yet for her to name her direct suspicions. She fell back on a generalisation.

"I cannot say with any certainty," she replied; "but I must tell you the truth about last night. Will you please treat it seriously, uncle?"

Warren Murdoch's expression of surprise became more pronounced.

"Yes—I will promise you that, Cicely—but I must say you seem to be talking a great deal of nonsense."

Her determination made her retort fiercely: "It is not nonsense! It is the truth—and you would be well advised to pay attention to it." Before he could answer, she had proceeded: "The real reason why I left my room last night was because I had a presentiment that someone was prowling about the house."

"Dartmoor is scarcely the place for the average burglar, my dear!"

Her reply was swift, and to the point.

"I knew this man—whoever he might prove to be—was not an ordinary burglar. Certain suspicions had been forming in my mind for some time—although you seem to laugh at the theory, uncle, I was convinced that people existed who not only knew of your invention, but were determined to possess it. No, please let me go on." She lifted her hand in an emphatic gesture as Warren Murdoch seemed about to interrupt again.

"So strong was this feeling that I got up last night with the intention of coming straight to you and giving you a warning. When I had reached the gallery at the top of the staircase I was so sure of someone moving about below that I went on downstairs. Once I reached the hall I was certain I was right. And I was certain of something else. That was that this person was going in the direction of your laboratory."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive of it, uncle! Unfortunately, in the darkness, my candle went out and I did not relight it for fear of attracting attention. It was so black that I missed my footing and fell down the steps leading to the basement. I was forced to cry out—" She broke off, unable to proceed; for a moment the memory had unnerved her.

"And then?" Her uncle's attention was fully gained by this time.

She clutched the back of her chair.

"Uncle, what I am now going to say will sound unbelievable. I saw a man—and he had only half a face!"

"Half a face?" Warren Murdoch repeated the words in amazement.

"Yes. On one side—there—was nothing!"

Her uncle was incredulous.

"My dear," he said, "surely you were mistaken. You were deceived by the light."

She made a gesture of weariness.

"I have tried hard to convince you—and now you won't believe me," she said hopelessly. "But you must believe me! That creature was going to your laboratory. . . . Uncle, when I was in London I met a man —a man I feel sure who could be trusted. He gave me his card—will you let me write and ask him to come down?" She was speaking in little convulsive gasps, not realising fully the import of her words. All she was conscious of was the burning desire to have someone on her side.

"Who is this man?" Her uncle was peremptory in his demand.

"His name is Heath—Ian Heath. He saved me when I was attacked——"

"Attacked! What fresh absurdity in this? Why should you be attacked? And why have you not told me of it before?"

It all seemed so hopeless, but she had to go on.

"I did not want to worry you, and at the time I did not connect it with—this other thing."

"Where were you 'attacked,' as you call it?" Warren Murdoch was obstinately refusing to be convinced.

"In St. John's Street, after I had left the theatre. You will remember that I had arranged to go with Mrs. Simpson. Although I did not know it at the time I was apparently watched during the performance; and afterwards I was followed into the street by a man who tried to drug me by pushing a hypodermic-needle into my arm. If Mr. Heath had not come up, no doubt I should have been kidnapped."

The scientist ran his fingers through his scanty hair.

"It all sounds unbelievable," he declared, in a voice that was not free from anger; "and the only conclusion I can come to is that you were mistaken for someone else. In a great city like London it is possible, I suppose, for a girl to be molested in the manner you have described—one certainly reads of such things in the newspapers—but that a mistake was made I am absolutely convinced. Where was Mrs. Simpson all this while?"

"She had been telephoned for at the theatre and had left before the end of the performance. You must not blame her, uncle, for I had assured her I should be quite all right."

"So you would have been, of course, but for being mistaken for someone else."

"I do not think you are right there, uncle. I believe that the man who attacked me not only knew who I really was, but that I was related to you."

"Nonsense!"

"How can I make you see my point of view?" she exclaimed wearily; "it is not only because this house makes me afraid, but because I realize that we are so completely alone that—" She started to fumble for words when her uncle cut in.

"You wish me to allow this man Heath—a perfect stranger—to instal himself here for an indefinite period?"

"Uncle, that is unkind of you. Although I have pointed out the danger you are in you will not attempt to understand. Mr. Heath is, as you say, a complete stranger, but he was decent enough to rescue me from a blackguard, and afterwards, of his own free will, he gave me his card and said that if ever I wanted any further help I was to write to him. He seemed troubled about me, and hinted that I must be prepared

for further risks as the man who had assaulted me was a dangerous character."

"It is still inconceivable," protested her uncle.

"Inconceivable when you admit yourself that your invention, when perfected, may revolutionize everything that has gone before?"

"No one knows of this invention. It was to keep it secret that I came to this lonely place."

"I hate to contradict you again, uncle, but it is quite evident that some person or persons do know. There can be no other explanation of my being attacked in London, and of my meeting that creature in the passage outside the laboratory."

"I must see Grinstead about this," declared Warren Murdoch; and, without another word, turned away. Although he had been severely shaken, his somewhat narrow-grooved mind was not expansive enough to take in the real position.

As the door closed behind him, Cicely sank down into her chair. She had done all she could, and now the future must take care of itself.

Then, quickly, she drew herself up. But had she done all that was possible? Although her uncle had treated the suggestion with brusque contempt she felt in the abnormal circumstances that her duty, especially as regards Warren Murdoch, was to write to the man who had so chivalrously offered her his help. In the ordinary common sense matters of life her uncle was a child. He might be a brilliantly gifted scientist, but he had no grip on problems outside his own particular sphere. He wanted protecting. She would write to Ian Heath and ask if he could possibly spare the time to see her.

So strong was the motive force behind this resolution that she drew pen and paper towards her and

started immediately to write. The letter was soon composed.

"Dear Mr. Heath,

"You were kind enough to ask me to write to you should I ever find myself in further trouble. I am forced to believe that someone very dear to me, as well as myself, is threatened by a great danger. I am a stranger in England, and I should like your advice, as I feel I can trust you.

"Yours sincerely,

"Cicely Garrett."

Reading through what had been written, she experienced a momentary fear whether this man, of whom she knew so little, would understand. But this misgiving quickly vanished; young and inexperienced as she was, she felt certain her intuition had not been at fault. She recalled the level-eyed look Heath had given her and was not afraid. This man would not fail her.

Having addressed the envelope she decided to allow herself a few minutes' rest before starting the duties of the day. Reaching out a hand for the morning paper, which had just been delivered, she glanced at the front page.

A man's photograph, printed on the middle column, caused her to crane forward. A second glance and she uttered a sharp cry: the man to whom she had just written was dead. The photograph had the words "the late Mr. Ian Heath" printed beneath it, and was unmistakably the portrait of the man who two nights previously had saved her from one danger and had offered to save her from others.

She felt utterly crushed. A sense of desolation was overwhelming her. Although the man was practically a complete stranger, he had fashioned himself, in her

mind at least, as a friend—and she was desperately short of friends.

Rousing herself with an effort she read the short paragraph:

> "We regret to announce the death of Mr. Ian Heath, so well known in certain Government circles.
>
> "Mr. Heath, who had only returned from the Continent a few hours earlier, was discovered dead in his rooms, 52, York Buildings, Adelphi, W.C.2., in the early hours of yesterday morning.
>
> "His death is believed to have been the result of an accident."

It was a singularly worded announcement even to Cicely, and she pondered over it for some time. But reflection brought no solace; the only fact that mattered was that the man on whom she had counted for help had been snatched away by Death.

She rose and looked out of the window. An unusual sight claimed her attention. Upon a distant bluff of moorland she noticed the figures of two men. Their faces were turned in the direction of Doone Hall, and they were evidently watching the house.

Crossing the room she took from a wall-cupboard a pair of powerful field-glasses which had once belonged to her father.

Focussing these, she looked intently at the watchers. After a minute's observation her hands shook to such an extent that the glasses almost fell from her grasp.

She could not possibly be mistaken.

One of these men was Ian Heath.

Jerry Hartsgill's proposal, though apparently preposterous, had been acted upon—at least partially. Ian Heath had not left his rooms at 52, York Buildings in a coffin, but he had done what he considered to be the next best thing.

To allow his death announcement to be given to the world is a singular experience for a living man, but a few minutes' reflection persuaded Heath that the scheme might have certain definite advantages. There were a good many people in various parts of Europe who would read the news of his demise with satisfaction. Jerry Hartsgill had hit the nail a resounding wallop on the head when pointing out that, whilst he was believed to be dead, Heath, in another guise, would have the opportunity to put in some nifty work at any particular job he fancied. It might be somewhat awkward resuming his true identity—as, of course, he would be obliged to do one day—but the future must take care of itself. He couldn't be bothered with it at the moment.

The first thing was to convince the Dorrances of the acceptability of the scheme. This would be no slight matter, and Heath knew it, but tackled the task at once.

"Dorrance," he said to the faithful Joe when the ex-jockey appeared in answer to the summons, "from this moment I am dead—and don't you forget it!"

Dorrance's face became a battle-ground of warring emotion. Ian Heath had never shown himself to be a practical joker before and he could not understand the position.

"Dead, guv'nor—what do you mean, dead? How can you be dead when you've just eaten a good break-

fast? Wasn't the bacon all right? And if I goes down and tells my missus that you says as how her coffee was poisoned, Lorlummy, she won't 'alf carry on, I give you my word."

Heath slapped the speaker on the shoulder.

"There's really nothing for you to worry about, Joe," he explained; "but after that little dust-up a few hours ago the best thing that could happen to me, in the opinion of my learned friend here, is that certain people should be led to believe that I have been snuffed out."

Joe Dorrance favoured Jerry Hartsgill with a glance that seriously questioned the poet's sanity, but Heath burst into a laugh.

"It's quite a good idea, too, Joe."

The ex-jockey scratched his head.

"Being dead never struck me as being so funny," he rejoined; "may I ask, guv'nor, how long you've decided to be horsey combat?"

"Oh—a month or so," was the airy rejoinder.

Dorrance's expression became brighter.

"I thought you had more sense than to stay dead for ever, Mr. Heath; what worries me is how I shall break the news to the missus; she thinks far too much of you, guv'nor, even to imagine you dead, let alone to believe it."

"You must just tell her, Joe, that I've a very good reason for wanting to be quiet for the next few weeks—and that the only way I can get quietness is by being dead. She'll understand."

Dorrance resumed his worried look.

"She *won't*," he said with emphasis; "she'll be worrying my life out with questions—that's what she'll be doing. One of the first things she'll say is: what about the funeral?—these women are such sticklers for information."

Heath smiled.

"That reminds me, Joe; you don't happen to know anyone who wants to sell a good second-hand coffin cheap for cash, I suppose?"

At this point the dialogue was interrupted by a Homeric burst of laughter from Jerry Hartsgill.

"Cæsar's mackintosh!" roared the poet; "this is the best joke I've heard for years!"

The ex-jockey frowned on him severely.

"Coffins ain't my idea of a joke," he remarked; "it fair gives me the creeps to hear you, Mr. Heath," turning to his lodger.

"Never mind—you'll soon get over it, Joe. Now all I want you to do, after seeing your wife and explaining the whole thing to her"—Dorrance wriggled uncomfortably at the words—"is to go out and tell everybody you know that that nice and extremely handsome lodger of yours, Ian Heath, has died suddenly in his bath, in his bed, or wherever you think best. Anyway, he's dead, and having no living relatives it's your job to bury him. Pop off now, there's a good fellow." As Dorrance, looking thoroughly moidered, moved uneasily towards the door, Heath gave his final instruction: "And don't forget it must be a second-hand coffin—I can't afford a new one."

Dorrance, making incoherent noises, disappeared.

Heath turned to Jerry Hartsgill.

"Old son, I don't mind admitting that your wheeze grows on me—it was a positive brain-wave. The more I think about it the more I like it."

"It wasn't so bad," modestly confessed the other; "if I mucked about with the stage, I might use it as a basis for a farce."

"What I am going to do now," said Heath, "isn't very farcical." He had sat down at a small bureau and was taking a piece of writing-paper from a rack.

"Eh?"

"I say what I am going to do now isn't very farcical," repeated Heath, raising his voice. "It's one thing to tell your landlord that you've decided to be buried, but it's rather another matter informing your boss of the same decision." He paused to enjoy the joke of imagining what Sir Harker Bellamy, that grim, grey man, would do when he read the information that was shortly to be sent him in black and white.

So far as could be ascertained, the plan had worked without a hitch. At ten o'clock that morning a coffin had been carried somewhat ostentatiously in through the front door of No. 52, York Buildings. A short while later, a middle-aged gentleman, paunchy, with weak knees, wearing black garments and a beard, and who looked remarkably like an undertaker, left the house and walked through the crowd of sympathetic sight-seers who had gathered in the narrow street.

At nine o'clock that night this gentleman, minus his funeral garb, his protuberant stomach, and his beard, was sitting before a roaring fire in a cottage on Dartmoor. Opposite him was Jerry Hartsgill, busy with a corkscrew.

The rest of the cottage might have been badly in need of repair, but this room, which occupied the whole of the ground flood, was certainly comfortable. It was a real man's room. There was little furniture, but what there was had Jerry Hartsgill's personality stamped upon it. A couple of roomy if very old leather chairs, a writing-desk in the left-hand corner beneath the window, a huge chest of drawers, which served as both manuscript cupboard and sideboard, a folding dining-table—beyond a few prints on the distempered walls, and a worn carpet, there was little else to be seen. To Ian Heath, jaded after his journey and se-

cretly nerve-wracked because what he had turned into a jest had escaped by the narrowest possible margin being grim reality, it was a haven of the blest—a refuge, far from humanity and the evil it did, in which he could find peace and ease of mind and body.

They had had dinner on the train, but food was a subject to which Jerry Hartsgill gave much thought, and after mixing a couple of drinks, he set to work frying two huge steaks over the blazing fire.

"Can't bother with any veg. to-night, old son," he told Heath, stretched full length in a chair on the opposite side of the hearth; "haven't time; besides, I'm too darned hungry. There's one good thing about this air on Dartmoor, it keeps one pretty hungry. I hope you're feeling peckish?"

Heath yawned.

"That drive from the station on the back of your motor-bike would have given an ostrich the stomach-ache, but still I dare say I can manage one of those steaks—when they are ready."

"All right! All right! I'm being as quick as I can. And don't you run down Elizabeth——"

"Elizabeth? Have you a maid on the premises?"

"My motor-bike, you ass! Elizabeth—'Busy Lizzie' for short—is one of the best little old motor-bikes around these parts, let me tell you."

"Then it must be the only one on Dartmoor. However, so long as you don't ruin my tender nerves by letting me see it again, I promise not to complain."

"Ungrateful swine! I'll——" Before Hartsgill could proceed any further with his heated reproof, there was a knock at the door.

Heath, instinctively on the alert, jumped up at once.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"How should I know?" growled his host. Hartsgill took off the large apron covering his entire front which

he had donned for culinary purposes, and started to walk across the uneven floor.

"Mind those steaks don't burn," he mumbled, and then flung the door open.

A man wearing a motorist's leather coat and carrying a cap entered. Heath judged his age to be about thirty-six, and decided that he had shifty eyes: they were set too close together to be trusted.

"You must excuse me bothering you, gentlemen," said the caller, looking from one to the other, "but I was rather up against it. The fact is, with another five miles to go before I reached home, I found that my petrol-tank was empty. On the off-chance of the owner being a motorist, I called at this cottage after seeing the light. I hope you will forgive the intrusion."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr.——"

"Voyce is my name—Philip Voyce," quickly supplied the other. "I live on the Moor, too—five miles from here on the other side of Tavistock. I was scarcely aware that we were neighbours, or I would have looked you up before, Mr.——"

"Hartsgill. This is my friend——" Before the poet could supply his name, Heath had cut in.

"Gavin. Ronald Gavin." He made a slight inclination in the direction of the visitor, who bowed elaborately in return.

"Mr. Gavin is down here for his health; he hasn't been very well lately," supplied Hartsgill, quick on his cue.

"Awfully sorry—hope you will soon be better. If it isn't your chest, the air of Dartmoor ought to do you the world of good." As he spoke Heath felt that the man's unsatisfactory eyes were fixed intently on him.

Somehow the atmosphere had become tense. Hartsgill sensed it.

"I'll get the petrol—it's out in the shed," he stated. "Will you come with me, Mr. Voyce?"

The caller bowed again to Ian Heath.

"Good-night, Mr. Gavin." There seemed to the listener to be a hint of mockery in his tone; "I trust I shall soon have the pleasure of seeing you again."

Heath replied in kind.

"As we happen to be neighbours, no doubt we shall run across each other before very long."

Jerry Hartsgill opened the door. A storm must suddenly have arisen. There was an unexpected violent gust of wind, which set everything in the room shaking.

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated Hartsgill, partly in distress but more in surprise.

As for Heath, he felt inclined to laugh. When the gust of wind had first filled the room, Voyce had clapped his hands quickly to his uncovered head. But he was too late—the wig he was wearing blew off, disclosing a completely naked skull.

"Permit me."

Ian Heath, his amusement severely controlled, picked up the wig which had dropped at his feet and handed it to the discomfited owner.

The latter glared with open hostility.

"Thank you," he snapped.

Within ten minutes Hartsgill was back.

"Well, what do you think of my next-door neighbour—apart from the wig, of course?" he asked Heath.

The latter shifted in his chair.

"I am afraid I am not in the fortunate position to be able to congratulate you," he replied; "I don't know what occupation the gentleman may follow, but I'm willing to lay a slight shade of odds that he's seen the inside of a gaol some time or other."

"You don't suggest that his proper place is Dartmoor—the prison, I mean?"

"Shouldn't be surprised. I didn't care for the cut of the cove at all, at all, although he has a certain 'air' with him. I wonder," Heath added musingly, "if he recognised my unworthy self?"

Hartsgill scoffed.

"You don't think that the whole bally world is in mourning for you, surely?"

"Jerry," was the retort, "you're shockingly irreverent. At the same time, I'm not forgetting that that ass Dicky Standish printed my photograph in the *Daily Miracle* this morning, that—oh, well, never mind," the speaker broke off inconsequentially; "let's change the subject."

"Righto!" supported the poet. Resuming his immense apron, he fell back to his task and quickly had the steaks steaming on a couple of hot plates.

It was an ambrosial meal. The steaks were delicious, and Ian Heath declared he had never sampled better cheese. Biscuits and butter that tasted and smelt of the English countryside completed the meal. Washed down by some most excellent home-brewed ale, it was a feast fit for a king.

Afterwards, with their pipes burning evenly, and whiskies and sodas ready to hand, the two friends fell to yarning again. Much had happened to both since they had last met, but especially to Heath, and it was some while before Ian put the question which had been hovering on his lips for hours.

"Jerry," he said, "where does the girl live you were telling me about?—let me see, what did you say her name was? Cicely Garrett, or something?"

"So-ho!" wheezed Hartsgill, turning sideways so quickly that his eye-glasses slipped from his nose; "is it possible, ye gods, that the Immaculate One, the

Monk, the Anchorite, and the What-not has fallen a victim to the tender pash? Whisper it not in the Chancellories of Europe, breathe it never so softly in the ante-rooms of the more degraded night-clubs!"

"Shut up, you ass! Can't a fellow ask an ordinary everydayish sort of question without you bringing out the trumpets and shawms?"

Hartsgill sobered somewhat.

"Any particular reason in inquiring about this—er—particular girl, old boy?" he asked in a change of tone.

"Yes."

Hartsgill stared at his friend.

"Sorry I put in the comic relief," he said.

"Oh, that's all right. Sit back again, Jerry, and I'll tell you a story. When I have finished, you'll understand why I'm making inquiries about the girl you have called 'Cicely Garrett.' Ready?"

"Fire away," said Jerry, stoking his pipe again.

The story did not take long to tell. When it was over, Hartsgill became grave. "This is where Old Man Coincidence gets his arm twisted," he said; "but I'm pretty safe in saying, I think, that the girl you met in Town is my Cicely Garrett all right."

Heath tapped his pipe loudly on one of the fire-dogs.

"Your Cicely Garrett?"

"Oh, all right, all right! Dash it, I merely said that because the girl lives only a few miles from here."

"Not in the direction that fellow Voyce lives, I hope?"

"Doone Hall is at the apex of what might be a triangle. This cottage and where Voyce said he lived might form the points of the base."

Heath was still unsatisfied.

"Who is the fellow? And what's he doing here? One can understand a natural eccentric like you living by

yourself on Dartmoor—but this chap Voyce: What's his business?"

Hartsgill shook his head.

"I know absolutely nothing about the joker," he replied. "I have heard of the cove, but this is only the second time I have met him. At first blush I didn't like the fish—as I told you back in Town."

After this the talk drifted again to the girl. Hartsgill's description of Cicely Garrett was so vivid that Heath became convinced she must be the mysterious unknown he had been fortunate enough to befriend in London.

Jerry, after flinging another log on the fire, sank back into his seat with a grunt.

"From all accounts, that place, Doone Hall, isn't exactly the home I should have chosen for a young and attractive girl," he said unexpectedly.

"What's the matter with it?" questioned Heath, instantly on the alert.

Hartsgill hesitated. Then he turned and looked at his friend.

"Well, it's said to be haunted by a vampire," he stated, and glared across as though expecting a scoffing rebuke.

AT CLOSE QUARTERS

Cicely told herself she could not be mistaken. The man whose face she saw through the powerful field-glasses was none other than Ian Heath. And yet the newspaper that morning had said he was dead!

What was at the back of this fresh bewilderment she could not understand; but it was sufficient for the moment to realise that the man on whom she had counted for help had come by some miraculous chance

almost to her very doorstep. Without waiting to consider the question further, without waiting, indeed, to put on either hat or coat, she rushed from the room, down the main staircase, into the wide hall, and out through the big oak door. She was going to speak to Ian Heath.

Before she could leave the grounds, the unmistakable sound of a motor-cycle getting under way caused her to increase her pace. The high garden wall and the thick belt of trees encircling the grounds prevented Cicely from getting a view of the bluff, and it was not until she had left the grounds and had reached the top of the rough rising land outside the entrance gates to Doone Hall that she had a clear sight of the neighbouring country.

Then her heart sank. Four hundred yards or so away was a motor-cycle receding into the distance. It carried two men—and one of these she knew to be Ian Heath.

Without regard to anything but her feeling of desperation, she started to shout. But, although she used the full force of her lungs, her calls were powerless against the strong wind which was blowing in the opposite direction. All this time she had been running as fast as her legs could carry her, but now, with a last choking gasp, she sank exhausted on to the short, stumpy grass of the moor.

She started to sob gently. The relief of those tears! This was the first time she had allowed her pent-up feelings any escape, and as the minutes passed, she felt herself becoming calmer. Reflection brought the half-satisfactory knowledge that Ian Heath, unless she were mistaken—and in spite of that announcement in the *Daily Miracle* that morning, she knew she was not mistaken—must be somewhere in the neighbourhood. That meant he could be found. After lunch she

would get out the ramshackle Ford car which Neale, the butler, used, and scour the district. There were one or two cottages within a ten-mile radius at which Ian Heath might be staying; and if her quest still proved unsuccessful, she would go into Tavistock and make a round of the inns and hotels.

She had just risen with the intention of walking straight back to the house when a noise quite close caused her to start. From behind some rough scrub first a face and then a man's body appeared.

There was a significance in the appearance of Philip Voyce at this time and in this place. Once again he had materialised at a moment of tense crisis.

Voyce was ready with an explanation.

"I have been out for my usual daily tramp, Miss Garrett," he stated; "after driving Mr. Grinstead back to his office, the Moor called me. It was in one of its most enchanting moods, and I had to leave my desk in the endeavour to capture the spirit of the scene."

She had a presentiment of doubt.

"Why were you hiding yourself behind that bush?" Colour flamed in her cheeks, and her tone was commanding.

Philip Voyce bent his head.

"You are unkind to me, Miss Garrett," he said. "It was true that I concealed myself behind that patch of scrub, but it was with no eavesdropping purpose that I did so. Consideration for your feelings—I noticed that you were weeping—was my sole prompting." Before she could step back he had moved nearer. She could see the muscles of his jaw working, the dilatation of his nostrils, noticed also the thin coating of perspiration on his forehead.

"I cannot hope to express to you how deeply grieved I am to know that you are mentally distressed, Miss

Garrett. Will you not tell me the cause of your trouble, and allow me to help you?"

She stepped back so quickly that his extended arm was brushed aside.

"You are the last man in the world I would ask for help," she replied.

The truth was out now, and she did not repent it. On the other hand, she had a distinct sense of relief: it was time that this man, whom she instinctively distrusted, should receive a definite warning. Perhaps now there would be an end to that covert, stealthy suggestion of love-making which had so nauseated her.

Voyce looked as though she had given him a fresh wound.

"I will say nothing except that you are unjust to me," he replied, adding almost immediately: "the time may come when possibly you will be glad——"

Cicely turned away so impatiently that the rest of the sentence was lost. She did not give him another glance, but started to walk rapidly back down the hill towards Doone Hall.

The first person she saw upon arriving at the house was Neale. The butler was in the dining-room looking over some silver.

His characteristically uneasy manner when he saw her caused Cicely to close the door and address the man.

"Neale," she said, "I want to have a talk with you."

The plate basket he was holding shook in his hand. A greyish tinge crept into the butler's naturally pallid face. He looked as though he was on the verge of a collapse.

She wasted no words.

"Neale, I want your confidence. I feel I am entitled

to it. What is the explanaton of your strange manner?"

"Strange—manner—miss?" The butler repeated the words slowly, and with a pause in between as though endeavouring to concentrate his thoughts. His lips twitched.

"It is useless for you to try to put me off, Neale. Ever since I came to Doone Hall I have noticed how peculiar your behaviour has been. What is the reason for it? Aren't you happy?"

He replied in that same slow, hesitating way.

"There are some people who aren't meant to be happy in this world, I'm thinking, miss."

The answer might easily have infected her with its own gloom, but she mentally brushed it aside, and spoke more sharply.

"Nonsense! Everyone was meant to be happy—even in a house like Doone Hall. And don't you realise, Neale, how distressing it is to me to see you going about looking as though you expected to die any minute? The house is gloomy enough without that."

The hand which was grasping the side of the table became so taut that the knuckles seemed about to burst the skin.

"I am very sorry, miss, if I have been the means of giving either you or the master any pain—but—" the man continued amazingly, "death would be no hardship to me—in fact, I'd welcome it."

"Instead of answering my questions you make me more mystified," retorted Cicely sharply; "and it's sheer weakness to talk as you are doing. You have a duty to your wife."

The butler received the rebuke submissively. He made no reply, merely hanging his head.

Cicely was tired of being baffled, and this man was still determined not to give her the confidence for which she had asked. Whilst sorry for him in a meas-

ure, she had to shake him out of his present morose mood.

"Neale," she said very distinctly, looking into the man's drawn face, "why was the door leading to the laboratory left unlocked last night?"

The man nervously licked his lips. He seemed about to make some sort of a reply when a tense voice broke in.

"Don't say it, James—don't say it!"

Cicely swung round. Standing in the doorway was Janet Neale, the butler's wife. The woman was trembling.

"What are you doing here, Janet?" Cicely's anger forced her to take a step towards the woman, but before she could reach the door the butler had pushed past her.

"You fool!" he said to his wife; "go back to your kitchen!" The two exchanged a quick look that must have been charged with significance, for with a whimpering cry the woman obeyed the butler's fierce command. She crept away like a dog that had been whipped.

Neale himself stood humbly before the girl after he had closed the door.

"My wife is not well—you must have noticed that for yourself, miss. She has not been well for some time. I am rather anxious about her—she gets what they call delusions. She is particularly bad this morning—you must please not take any notice of what she has just said." The man's earnestness was almost pitiable.

It was this same intensity of manner that increased Cicely's already grave suspicions.

"I am very sorry if your wife is not well, Neale," she had started, when the door behind her burst open again. Janet Neale, tears streaming down her face, rushed forward. The woman seized her arm and wept.

Between the sobs came the broken words: "He didn't mean any harm, miss! I swear he didn't mean any harm! It's not his fault—it's that old devil! That wicked old devil! How I wish he were dead—I'll kill him myself!"

Turning to Neale for an explanation, Cicely was just in time to see him fall fainting to the floor.

THE NIGHT WATCH

THE threads on which big events often hang! If Jerry Hartsgill had not lost a trousers button at that precise moment, Ian Heath would have stayed on the bluff land overlooking Doone Hall. And, having stayed, he would inevitably have met Cicely Garrett. As it was——

"Hellishly sorry, old man, but my breeks are coming down," declared Jerry in a tone of suppressed anguish.

Ian Heath awoke from his spell. He had been contemplating things of the spirit, but was brought back to earth with a bang. He knew from experience that much concerning the poet was precarious. Apparently his trousers shared the same fate.

"Well, what about it?" he asked.

Hartsgill snorted.

"Don't you understand, you fool? I only had one button on the back . . . and now *that's* gone. You haven't got a bit of string or anything? No, you wouldn't have! So we'd better be buzzing back, then. Yes," as a kind of after-thought, "that's where that girl lives."

At this moment Cicely Garrett, having made her survey through the field-glasses, was hurrying through the grounds of Doone Hall. If Heath had but known! But he did not know—and the matter of his com-

panion's trousers became a question of some urgency.

"Hang you and your breeks," he pronounced, and, with Hartsgill already a-straddle the motor-bike, he mounted on the back of "Busy Lizzie" and prepared to have a few more important bones rattled out of place.

Between the bumps he did a little reflecting. His first thought upon seeing the house in which Cicely Garrett lived was to walk up to the front door and send in his name, but now he was glad he had acted more cautiously. It would be better for him to write informing her that he was in the neighbourhood, and that, having discovered by an accident that she lived at Doone Hall, he would like to call. Might he? Yes, he finally decided as, his long travail ended, "Busy Lizzie" pulled up with a jerk outside Four Ways Cottage—Jerry Hartsgill's picturesquely named abode —he had acted rather discreetly in not calling upon the girl that morning. In the first place, it was conceivable that she wasn't his particular girl at all—Hartsgill might have described quite another person—and, secondly, he remembered that, whilst he had offered his help, the girl in London had not accepted it. That was that—whatever his private feelings might be.

Whether it was due to the tragedy of the lost trousers button, or to some other cause, his host seemed somewhat *distrait* during lunch. Certainly, Jerry was not his usual cheery self. Thinking that this abstractedness might be due to the temperament which periodically afflicted so many men of Hartsgill's craft, Heath plunged into conversation. And, selecting the most interesting topic he knew, said: "Come on, let's have that vampire story again, Jerry. Of course, it's absolute tosh, but I'd like to hear all the details."

Hartsgill moodily stuffed black tobacco into a blacker pipe. Whilst he was so occupied a memory of

Doone Hall, as he had seen it that morning, returned to Heath. Set down in that dark valley, with that belt of high trees shadowing it on every side, this house might well be the scene of some sinister tradition. Even in the clear morning light it had looked to him sinister, aloof, and mysterious; what sort of a place would it be, then, at night? The knowledge that any cultured, refined, sensitive girl was forced to live there was somehow depressing.

"I've told you the whole beastly story once," complained Hartsgill.

"What's the matter with you? You're as touchy as a *prima donna*. Let's have the yarn!"

Seeing no way of escape, Jerry narrated again the dreadful tradition of Doone Hall as it had been given him by a garage-keeper in Tavistock town.

"You've never met this particular bird, I suppose?" Heath asked when he had come to an end.

His host shuddered.

"No, I'm glad I haven't. And don't joke about it!"

Heath laughed.

"Surely you don't believe in the rot?" he asked.

There was no answering smile from his companion.

"Answer my question," roared Heath; "do you or do you not believe in this poppycock bilge? Vampire! Ye gods, who ever heard of such eye-wash?"

There was still no mirth from Hartsgill. What was far more impressive, there was no explosion of anger.

"Everyone round here believes in it," was the serious reply; "and even in England I've known things happen which couldn't very well be explained—not even by scientists and blokes like that, Ian. If it's all the same to you, I'm not going to give a definite answer. I've an open mind."

"All right," replied Heath, as though he were con-

ceding a point; "but just tell me this: when was the last visitation?"

The reply so staggered him that he forgot to be sceptical.

"About ten nights ago," said Hartsgill; "the Thing was then distinctly seen hovering round Doone Hall."

"Who saw it?"

"A farm labourer named Thomas, who was crossing the Moor. He was so scared that the doctors in Tavistock think he will lose his reason."

"Poor devil," commented Heath, another note in his voice. "But a yokel like that might have been so easily mistaken."

Hartsgill shook his head.

"No," he replied decisively; "it isn't the countryman, simple-minded yokel though he may be, who is likely to be mistaken in a matter of this kind. His imagination isn't sufficiently developed. He tells just what he sees, and nothing more. You ought to know that."

"And what does this man Thomas say he saw?" asked Heath.

"A monstrous bat."

So much gravity did Hartsgill put into the words that his hearer would have been impressed in any case.

Heath asked further questions, but, perhaps because he had been so severely chaffed at the beginning of the conversation, Hartsgill seemed disinclined to talk any longer about the vampire of Doone Hall, and Heath was forced to drop the subject.

No doubt it was the maddest thing imaginable, and yet Heath went on. To have turned back now would have been a confession of weakness—and of something worse in his mind than weakness: of sheer funk. And

he didn't believe in the story—of course he didn't believe in it: how could he? This was 1929. Strange things did happen, even in England, as Jerry Hartsgill had said, but not vampires—certainly not vampires.

An alert cross-examiner, accompanying Heath, might have put some shrewd questions to the Secret Service man as they trudged along through the darkness. The first of these would have been: If you scoff at such a thing, if you do not believe that an elemental and a super-physical can be found in England to-day, why are you risking breaking your neck by being out in country which is so strange to you at this time of night? (Note: It was ten minutes to midnight.)

To this very pertinent query Heath would have replied, no doubt: "Preposterous as I know the story to be, yet I want to have the chance of seeing for myself, if that is possible. It is extremely unlikely, I dare say, that this Creature will be abroad to-night, but I had to take the first opportunity of testing the truth of this horrific legend." He might not have added, however, his most potent reason of all: that the girl in whom he had a very considerable interest was believed to be living in Doone Hall, and that it was principally on her behalf that he was abroad that night.

Despite the nature of his task, he was glad he was alone. This was a one-man job; later, perhaps, he would welcome Jerry Hartsgill's aid. Jerry, in the meantime, had sufficient on his hands.

After supper that night the poet had made a surprising confession.

"I dare say you have noticed I've been roaming about like a bear with a sore head all day," he said; "well, the fact is, I'm always like that when an idea for a poem comes along. I chew it over in my mind, fret and worry—and get broody. . . . Not fit to live

with then . . . sorry, old son. Not much of a host, I'm afraid—you've only been here forty-eight hours and yet——"

Heath playfully punched the other in the ribs.

"Push on with the epic, Jerry, my lad, and don't bother about me. I shall be perfectly all right. So long as I'm here, never let me interfere with Old Man Afflatus. From all I've heard, he's a coy bird at the best of times, and you have to put salt on his tail directly the chance pops up. Where do you do your writing?"

"Here, usually," pointing to the desk. "I say, Heath, it's jolly good of you to be so decent about it."

"Not at all. Carry on. I'll be off to bed."

"Sure you don't mind?" Hartsgill was very anxious.

"Of course I don't mind. If you're still at it in the morning, I'll make the tea. And if you want a fresh supply of wet towels, sing out."

As he walked upstairs, he could hear the poet dragging his chair up to the writing-table. Then came the scratch of a pen over paper. . . . Jerry was getting down to it.

Heath waited until half-past eleven. Hartsgill had not yet come up, and presumably was still driving hard at his new poem. He would not disturb him. . . .

Opening the bedroom window, he slithered gently to the ground *via* a stout creeper. It was the easiest of jobs. In his overcoat-pocket Heath had a whisky-flask, a revolver, and a climbing ladder made of fine, flexible cord, with a stout grappling hook at one end. This last was an old friend.

It was very dark, but the fact did not worry him unduly. This journey, which might have daunted the average man, had no real terrors for Ian Heath: he

was accustomed to finding his way in the darkness across unknown country.

There was a cold wind blowing over the Moor; this bit into him so shrewdly that he soon had to turn up the collar of his overcoat. Heading straight in the direction in which he knew his destination lay, he was forced to walk warily on account of the holes in the ground. Stepping into one of these unsuspectingly might easily result in a broken ankle.

But for the warning sound made by the gushing water, he might have walked straight into a rocky stream. Skirting this, he came into woody country, so black that he was forced to use his electric-torch.

Once he stopped, not through uncertainty of direction, but because he fancied he heard someone behind him sob. It was just like a muffled cry of pain.

His heart thudding, he faced about. Whispering voices surrounded him; it was as though lurking in the dense blackness were a number of mocking sprites.

Heath softly laughed. What a fool! There was no one there: the noises he had heard were merely the soughing of the wind in the leaves of the trees! Ass!

Following out the advice he had given Jerry Hartsgill a couple of hours previously, he pushed on. Now that he had come so far, nothing short of an earthquake or a column of soldiers would have kept him back. He had clean forgotten his resolve of a couple of days before when he swore in his haste that he would allow nothing to stand in the way of his obtaining peace and quietude.

Three-quarters of an hour's walking brought him to another scrub-covered piece of bluff-land. Below him was a valley; and in this—now that the early moon began to show itself—was a dark, oblong shape dimly seen outlined against a lowering background of trees.

He knew that he had arrived at his destination, for this must be Doone Hall. The bluff on which he stood he was able to recognise, through the rough track, as the very hill from which he had looked down upon the house that morning. The words of Hartsgill returned: "Yes—that's the place where the girl lives."

As he walked slowly down the hill towards the house he was accompanied by a spectre. It was not Fear for himself, but for the girl whom he had resolved to try to protect with or without her consent. The mental picture of that scene outside the St. John's Theatre came back so vividly that he quickened his speed. The terror which had been in the girl's eyes—was it caused by her residence in this gloomy house which was said to be haunted by a thing unspeakably evil?

Passing through the belt of trees that acted as a sort of guard to the entrance gates of Doone Hall, he found himself confronted by a high, stone wall. The house itself was still some fifty yards away, secreted in the midst of spacious grounds.

Clambering up the wall by means of the cord ladder, he dropped into some long grass on the other side. Even in that uncertain light, he was able to see that the grounds were in a bad state of neglect. An atmosphere of decay was brooding over the place.

Conquering a momentary feeling of disquietude, he drew nearer the house. The Hall was wrapped in impenetrable gloom, but as he took up a position on an old garden-seat, one of whose legs as he tested it proved unsteady, a light suddenly shone in one of the upper windows.

He stared speculatively at it.

THAT WHICH FLEW

THE light continued to fascinate the watcher, but as he studied it, Heath was unable to decide whether it had any definite purpose. Of course, in that prevailing gloom, it could conceivably be seen for a considerable distance. In that case it might serve as a signal of some sort, but, on the other hand, one of the persons living in Doone Hall was possibly a bad sleeper and had turned on the light in order to read.

It was hopeless for him, it seemed, to attempt to solve the question. The light was in a room high up in the West Tower, so that he could not hope to reach it even with the help of his climbing ladder.

Still, he was going to wait. Something might happen. He could only muster as much patience as was possible. But, with every nerve keyed up, inactivity proved difficult. The thought that something might be going on inside that house—something which if he were present he might be able to prevent—made him fret and curse. A few full-blooded oaths went sailing down the night wind.

After half an hour his mood changed. There were three reasons. The first was that the intriguing light in the upper room had gone out; the second that, in spite of considerable movement on his part, he felt wretchedly cold; whilst the third was the speculation of what Jerry Hartsgill would say when he went up to his bedroom to find that he had disappeared without a word of explanation.

The professional soldier will tell you that the hardest hour is that immediately prior to the battle; and Ian Heath, a trained man-at-arms in another direction, found this waiting intolerably dull. To relieve the monotony of walking up and down, he commenced now

a fresh tour of the outside of the house. It was as he had imagined: to effect an entry into Doone Hall would have called for the combined efforts of a gang of skilled cracksmen; the place was a veritable fortress with its solid walls, heavily shuttered windows and barred kitchen quarters. This much he was able to discover with but a scanty use of his electric-torch.

There is nothing like loneliness for sobering hot blood, and when that loneliness is attended by intense cold, reaction, when it comes, may be severe. Heath now argued with himself that he may have been a fool to be there at all. He was not certain that the girl he knew lived in this house; and even if she did, she might not be there at this time.

By now, having completed his tour of inspection, he was back at the old garden-seat again. He looked at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. It was twenty minutes past one. With luck he would be back at the cottage about half-past two. Perhaps he could get into bed without Jerry Hartsgill learning anything of his small-hours expedition. Somehow, he did not fancy telling Jerry about this trip—the idea of trekking across the Moor in the way he had done now appeared ridiculous.

He would cut back. An all-night vigil seemed an absurd quest: it was like tilting at a windmill. In the daylight his task—if he was still of the same mind—would be infinitely easier. He could call at the house and inquire if Miss Cicely Garrett lived there. If she didn't, all well and good—he would express his polite regrets, and that would be an end of the whole affair. But if she did, he would be able to ascertain whether she was *his* girl—the girl who had not given him her name, and whom he had always thought of as the unknown. Then he would have a straight talk with her, and his future movements would depend upon the

attitude she adopted. After her refusal in London, she might resent his butting-in.

As for that talk of a vampire. . . .

He stopped to have a last look at Doone Hall before turning away. In spite of his new resolve, he was like a man who, turning up for an appointment and finding that the other person has not appeared, is yet reluctant to go away. Deep down in his mind, although he was so cold and dissatisfied with everything, Heath hoped against hope that someone, by an amazing chance, would come running out of the house to invite him inside.

It was while he stood in this strangely expectant manner that he saw a blacker shape outline itself against the dark mass of masonry. To his astonishment it moved—it moved quickly.

The next moment he had gasped.

The Thing was flying. . . .

Scarcely able to credit what he saw, he strained his eyes. This apparition was in the form of a bat, but it was a bat larger than any ever recorded in the annals of zoology; even though the light was so bad, he could see that it was a monstrous size. This foul Thing might have come out of some fœtid African jungle; it was incredibly alien to a sweet-smelling, dreaming English countryside.

The first feeling he had was that an icy hand had been placed on his spine. The impossible had happened, the unbelievable had come true! The Creature, far too huge to be a bat, flying noiselessly round the house, took on the shape of a man with wings.

The Vampire of Doone Hall. . . .

"My God!" he breathed.

Many remarkable things had been witnessed by Heath, but now his stupefaction was such that temporarily all sense of action was paralysed. This weird

and uncanny spectacle had numbed him. Although there was a revolver in his overcoat-pocket, he did not think of producing it; his mind was centred wholly on the mere fact of *seeing*.

Reaction, when it came, came quickly. The first overwhelming feeling of surprise passed. Supernatural this shape might be, but it was evil and unclean. With a fierce throb of joy, Heath remembered the automatic he had brought, and he thrust his hand into the overcoat-pocket.

There was a hissing sound behind him, and his arm was seized with a force that threatened to wrench the limb from its socket. Heath swung round with his left fist, and the knuckles rattled against something hard. He saw a contorted face—lips drawn back in a snarl from yellow, broken teeth—and knew this enemy at least to be human.

The unknown attacker had the initial advantage, but Heath was no sluggard at this sort of thing, and there were a trick or two of rough-house scrapping which he had picked up himself. Pressing closer to the man, he drove his left knee up quickly and suddenly. A grunt told that it had gained its objective—the man's stomach. The pressure on his right arm relaxed and, with a sudden twist, he freed himself.

But instantly the other leapt for his throat. The brute seemed more beast than man, a homicidal maniac, lusting to kill. Heath's foot slipped and he crashed to the ground with his opponent on top of him.

What followed had many of the features typical of a particularly ferocious dog-fight. Ian Heath was forced to be pretty primitive himself, for he discovered that his foe did not draw the line at biting or gouging.

The tide of the fight ebbed and flowed. Heath found that his strength was being sapped; he was not in the

best of condition owing to his recent mid-European experiences, and this jungle-beast who had sprang at him so unexpectedly from out of the darkness had almost unbelievable energy. He was forced to resort to every trick he knew—and yet he was waging a losing battle.

The blood was surging in his brain. The man had both hands clutched tightly round his windpipe; his thick, rough fingers were quickly squeezing out of him what remained of his breath. His end was near. But the irony of it—to be done to death like this!

He made one last frantic effort to get free, ramming his head forward in the hope that it would make the man bite his tongue.

In this manœuvre, it seemed, he was partially successful. There was the sound of a foul, strangled oath, and the man must have automatically raised one hand. At any rate, Heath felt the terrible pressure on his throat relax.

Exultation rioted in him. He had a chance, after all. Life was infinitely sweet, and he was not going to die at the hands of this crude, murderous swine. Some measure of strength flowed back into him at the thought, and, lifting a fist that had been useless before, he swung it with what power he retained at the man's face.

The blow connected; the second hand released its hold on his throat—and then, to his utter astonishment, his foe, growling and snarling like some frightened animal terrified of a trap, commenced to slither away on all fours through the thick, rank undergrowth.

For a moment Heath was so amazed that he made no attempt to follow—and when he did, an overpowering weakness attacked him with such force that he could

not take up the pursuit. With everything swimming before him, he reeled back and lay prone.

THE TALK IN THE GARDEN

BEWILDERMENT greeted him as he recovered.

He blinked his eyes. Kneeling by his side was a girl —and she was the girl with bronze hair.

"Are you better?" Her voice, low-toned, was anxious and singularly attractive.

"Better?" And then he remembered the astonishing fight in the garden. "Oh, I'm pretty right," he added untruthfully. To prove his words, he tried to sit up—and failed dismally.

"I noticed a light flashing in the garden—and came down," she said simply. "Then I saw two figures struggling. . . ."

The words made Heath alert. He realised, above everything else, that this girl in the dressing-gown was in a lonely part of the grounds, some distance from the house, in possible danger of being attacked—and that, until he recovered, he was powerless to give her adequate protection. Every other emotion was dwarfed by that one predominant fact.

It was a great effort to think clearly.

"You are Miss Garrett—Cicely Garrett?"

"Yes," she answered instantly, "and you are Mr. Heath. I saw you this morning from my window. Why did the paper announce that you were dead?"

He made another attempt to sit up, and this time succeeded. Perhaps the knowledge that the girl's arm was round his shoulders lent him strength.

"That is quite a story," he replied, "and although it may have nothing to do with what happened tonight, I'll be very pleased to tell it to you—a little later

on." Then, realising that the girl was very thinly clad, he said more quickly: "But you cannot stay here—you must get back to the house. You *are* living at Doone Hall, I suppose?" So fantastic had been the night's events that the question did not seem unnatural.

"Yes—I live there with my uncle." Then her tone also quickened. "But you are badly hurt . . . you want attention. You must come back with me."

"But it's the middle of the night!" He stopped before adding: "It's because you have proved yourself so brave that I want to warn you this place contains danger."

"Danger!" She seized on the word, as though it were painfully familiar. Looking into his face, she asked: "Did you see anything"—she paused for a moment—"anything flying, Mr. Heath?"

He parried the question, after rising with difficulty. There was some quality so particularly loathsome attached to the monster whose sudden appearance had stupefied him, that he felt he could not tell her the truth.

"I had all my attention occupied by the gentleman who sprang at me in so unmannerly a fashion without any warning. No doubt he resented my intrusion. . . . Are you in the habit of prosecuting trespassers, Miss Garrett? I had a very real reason for being here, you know."

Her reply took him by surprise.

"I'm sure of that. As a matter of fact, I wanted you to come; I had written to you . . . before reading of your death this morning, that was."

He attempted to explain.

"There happened to be a very real reason why that report, erroneous as it was, became circulated, Miss Garrett. But you are shivering; you mustn't stay out in the cold any longer. I won't permit it."

"I shall be all right; but you—can you walk so far, do you think?"

"I am sure I can, but . . . well, I have already made the brainy remark that it is an unusual hour to pay a call."

She gave no heed.

"When my uncle asks, you will have to invent something; you can explain that you became lost on the Moor. Are you staying in Tavistock?" she broke off.

"No. At a cottage about five miles away over in that direction," pointing. "That's as near as I can get it—I can't tell you the district, because I do not know if it has a name. But the friend who is putting me up has spoken about you. His name is Gerald Hartsgill, and he writes poetry and keeps hens. Curious combination, I know, but he seems to think rather well of it."

Ringing clear through the darkness sounded the girl's rippling laugh.

"Excuse me—but what you said struck me as being extraordinarily funny. Poetry and hens. . . . But I must get you to the house."

Taxed on the point, Heath, no doubt, would have been honest enough to confess that there was no need for him to have accepted the girl's proffered help. But he did accept it, and the touch of the rounded arm through the thin fabric of the dressing-gown gave him a thrill that was as delightful as it was surprising.

"I am afraid I left the front door open," Cicely confessed, when they arrived at the threshold.

A man's voice from within called: "My dear, what has happened now? Whatever are you doing out there?"

"There has been an accident, uncle," the girl replied unhesitatingly; and with the words, she pulled her companion forward.

Warren Murdoch stared. Awakened by hearing a

door slam, he had jumped out of bed and rushed straight to his niece's room. Alarmed to find it empty, he had gone through the house.

"An accident?" He looked perplexed and annoyed.

Ian Heath thought it time to do his bit.

"I got lost on the Moor, sir—and had been wandering about for—well, I scarcely know how long. Then I came across this house and thought whether I might venture to knock the owner up in order to get shelter for the night. Just as I was debating the point, I saw a figure climbing over the wall. Thinking the man might be a burglar, or that he could not be up to much good anyway, I followed. The fellow must have seen me, for after I had lost sight of him in the darkness, he attacked me unexpectedly. He was a ferociously powerful brute, and at one time I thought he would have finished me."

"Do you mean kill you?" interjected the elderly man, to whom he was telling this half-truth.

"That is exactly what I do mean. The man had both hands to my throat——"

He broke off. From the other side of the huge hall came the sound of a smothered cry.

Warren Murdoch turned.

"Who is that?" he called sharply.

A man with an unnaturally pallid face stepped forward.

"What are you doing out of bed, Neale?" asked Murdoch.

The reply was nervously given.

"I heard a disturbance, sir. . . . I thought I might be wanted." All this while, Heath noticed, the staring eyes of the speaker, whom he guessed to be the butler of this queer establishment, were fixed in his direction.

"Did you make that strange noise just now?" went on Warren Murdoch.

"Strange noise, sir? No, sir." The man's manner was evidence enough that he was lying, but to Heath's surprise his denial was accepted.

"Well, now you are up, you can make yourself useful. Get some hot drink ready and see about an extra bed. This is a peculiar fashion in which to make your acquaintance, sir," the speaker added, turning to the visitor, "but I wish you to believe that I am very grateful for your intervention. Have you any idea where this blackguard who attacked you may be at the present time?"

"I haven't, sir; the fellow vanished as quickly as he came. But I should say he was out of the grounds. The appearance of this young lady, who so courageously came to my rescue, probably frightened him. At all events, he slipped away—a fact for which I don't mind telling you I was profoundly thankful. I was in a particularly bad state at the moment."

"I shall have to get in touch with the local police tomorrow," commented his host; "this is the second case of an attempted burglary within twenty-four hours. We had—or, at least, my niece had—rather a distressing experience last night. I cannot allow this sort of thing to go on: one would scarcely imagine that one paid rates and taxes in order to ensure getting adequate protection for one's property. But allow me to introduce myself, Mr.——"

"Gavin. Ronald Gavin." Heath hated to deceive this old boy, but in case the girl had already mentioned that a person named Ian Heath was dead, it would be somewhat difficult to explain why he should choose to resurrect himself at two o'clock in the morning in the grounds of a lonely house in the wilds of Dartmoor.

"Thank you," was the courteous answer of his host; "my own name is Warren Murdoch. No doubt it is

quite unfamiliar to you, but that does not matter. What does matter is that my niece—Miss Cicely Garrett—stands the chance of getting pneumonia if she stands about here any longer. Cicely, my dear, you must return to your bed at once."

With a backward glance, the girl disappeared up the wide, winding staircase.

CONFIDENCES

THE bed was warm and comfortable, and, forgetting his aches and pains, Ian Heath slept soundly a few moments after his head touched the pillow. Even the thought of Jerry Hartsgill, fuming at the perplexity of his disappearance, could not keep him awake.

It was daylight when, aroused by a touch on his shoulder, he looked wonderingly about him. Recollection of the previous night's events did not return at once.

"Tea, sir?"

He looked up to see the pallid-faced butler by the bedside. The man was holding a tray, on which tea things were invitingly arranged.

"Oh, thank you, er——"

"My name is Neale, sir."

"Thank you, Neale." The speaker had not forgotten the name; he merely wished to keep the man in conversation for a time. In any setting this butler with the marked, furtive manner would have drawn his attention, but in this house in which it seemed anything could happen, the fellow interested him especially.

"No more attempted burglaries or murderous assaults last night I hope, Neale?" he asked, as the man poured out the tea.

"Beg pardon, sir?" The speaker's hand shook, so that some of the liquid spilled into the saucer.

"I asked if there were any further disturbances last night after I went to bed?"

"No, sir. Not that I am aware of, sir."

"If you don't keep that cup more steady you'll have it all over."

"Very sorry, sir." But the cup still being in obvious jeopardy, Heath took it.

"No further sign of the man who nearly closed my account?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

The butler's denseness—real or assumed—was almost as annoying as his palpable fright.

"I asked if you had seen anything more of the man who attacked me in the grounds last night?"

"No, sir—why should I have seen him, sir?"

Heath laughed. He wished the mirth to act as a cloak to his real thoughts. There was something decidedly fishy about this fellow, and he would not be satisfied until he had ascertained what it was. It was anything but an agreeable reflection to feel that this unsatisfactory servitor was in daily contact with Cicely Garrett.

"Oh, no particular reason, of course. Only if he had made another attempt to get into the house, I imagined you would have known."

"Quite so, sir. But nothing happened after you went to bed, sir."

Heath yawned—another piece of pretence.

"That's all right, then." He dismissed the man.

His mind remained very active after Neale had left. This place was uncanny full of problems which required solving. Was it a *real* vampire he had seen? Who was the man who had attacked him in the garden? Did Neale, the butler, know this man? If he

didn't, why was his behaviour so queer? And what was the big, central reason why all these mysterious happenings should be connected with Doone Hall? The old man seemed harmless enough—and the girl was absolutely straight. He would swear to that. It was very rum.

Dressed, he went downstairs to find Cicely Garrett awaiting him.

"I disliked telling your uncle a lie last night, but I thought it was necessary," he said at once, after wishing her good-morning. "And while I am on the subject, I want you to be kind enough to make me a promise."

She was quick to grasp his meaning.

"You do not want anyone to know you are in the district? Is that it, Mr. Heath?"

"Yes. I prefer to be known as 'Gavin—Ronald Gavin.' The reasons are adequate, but not dishonourable."

"I will remember, Mr.—Gavin. I had better get into the habit of calling you that straightaway, I suppose?"

"It would be as well perhaps, because if you slipped out with the 'Heath' in front of your uncle, he might look startled."

She decided mentally that Warren Murdoch certainly would be startled, considering that he had forbidden her to have any further communication with the man she had called "Heath."

They went into breakfast, which they had alone.

"You must excuse my uncle—he is so busy working in his laboratory this morning that he had an early meal."

The word laboratory made Heath look up. Again the girl was quick to read his thoughts.

"My uncle is an inventor—a scientist," she ex-

plained. "He is working at the present time on something which he thinks will turn out to be frightfully important, something which will mark a new epoch in scientific discovery. No," interpreting a second quick look, "I can't tell you anything more than that because I haven't the least idea what it is myself. But," lowering her voice, "I am sure——"

"Excuse me," interrupted her listener in a low tone. Heath rose quickly and tiptoed to the door, which he swung suddenly open.

"Miss Garrett did not ring, Neale," he said.

The butler, whom he had discovered straightening a mat, looked confused.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Thank you, sir," he mumbled.

"Was that man listening?" asked Cicely, when Heath resumed his seat.

"Considering that he was doing something which obviously didn't require attention, I think it is reasonably safe to presume that he was doing his best to overhear our conversation. Miss Garrett, I don't like to cast aspersions on a member of your household staff, but the truth is that fellow looks crooked to me."

"I am sure there is something wrong with him," agreed Cicely; "ever since I came here I have suspected Neale—there was something in his manner which was distasteful. The man seemed afraid to look you in the face—you know the type?"

"Very well," Heath assured her. "But what about your uncle? Neale is his servant. Has he noticed anything?"

She smiled rather ruefully.

"I am afraid it is no use expecting uncle to take any interest in anything outside of his invention." She bit her lower lip. "Something very suspicious happened the night before last."

Heath leaned across to her.

"What I am going to say may sound presumptuous, Miss Garrett, especially after you refused my help in London——"

"Many things have happened since," she broke in. "If I had known then what I know now I should have been glad to accept the aid you so kindly offered. You didn't think me ungrateful?"

"Of course not! I guessed you had your reasons. But now that we're getting really to understand each other, I don't mind confessing that my object in coming to Dartmoor was to try to give you a hand in one way or another. You see, when my pal Hartsgill said that one of his nearest neighbours was a girl with bronze-coloured hair, living in a house that hadn't too good a reput—I mean that was horribly lonely, I put two and two together and decided that you must be she. Put it down to instinct."

"I will," she smiled. "May I ask you a question, Mr.—Gavin?"

"Ask me a dozen."

She smiled again before replying: "Are you connected with the police?"

"What makes you think that?—the general bucolity of my appearance?"

"Please be serious."

"I am most terribly serious." Then, noting her expression: "Yes—er—in a way, I am connected with the police. But that again must be a close secret between us—if you don't mind."

"I promise not to forget. And, do you know, I guessed something of the sort. I thought you must have something to do with the police. You see," she continued, "I am an American. I have only been in England a few weeks. Mr. Murdoch is my one living relative. When he came into this property and decided

to live here, he cabled to me, asking if I would come and look after things for him. It was a rather a wrench leaving America and my friends—but I decided it was my duty to come to a lonely old uncle."

"Fortunate Mr. Murdoch," commented her listener; "well, now that we know so much about each other, do you think you could describe that very suspicious incident you referred to just now? You inferred that the man Neale was mixed up in it."

She crumbled bread for a moment. The warmth which the speaker had unconsciously put into his words had brought a flood of colour into her cheeks.

"Perhaps it is not fair to blame Neale, but the man has had the chance to explain his peculiar behaviour and has refused, so it is his own fault." She stopped for a brief space, as though collecting her thoughts. What she said next was surprising.

"Do you believe that a house can be haunted by an evil atmosphere?" she asked; "please do not think me too imaginative."

"Of course not, Miss Garrett; please go on."

"Ever since I first stepped inside Doone Hall I have felt that some malign influence was at work. Perhaps it is because he is so absorbed in his work that my uncle does not appear conscious of it. He is inclined to ridicule the suggestion, although he is a most kind and considerate man. Can you understand what I am trying to convey?"

"Yes—and I am not in the least inclined to scoff. My experience, however, has led me to put most faith in physical causes in phenomena of this kind. Tell me about the suspicious incident."

"I was coming to that. What I have said up till now was a sort of preface or introduction.

After a thoughtful pause, she went on.

"This malign influence has an object, I feel sure. It

concerns the invention on which my uncle is working."

"Then the motive power behind it must be purely physical," supplied Heath; "and physical things can be investigated," he added firmly.

She thanked him with a nod and a smile before resuming.

"The unfortunate part is that my uncle, by nature and temperament the most unsuspecting of men, cannot be induced to believe that there is anything wrong. I have not tried very hard up till now to convince him, but I know it would be useless if I did. I have endeavoured, however, to persuade him to leave Doone Hall, and he has refused. He says it is just the place for him to work, the quietness and loneliness being ideal for his purpose.

"Now I come to the incident I referred to just now," went on Cicely. "Mr. Philip Voyce——"

"Does that fellow come here often? I'm sorry for interrupting you again, but I should explain that a man who said his name was Philip Voyce called at my pal's cottage. I didn't like him."

The girl shivered.

"Neither do I," she confessed. Then, with an uneasy laugh: "It is stupid, of course, but Mr. Voyce has rather given my uncle to understand that—that——"

Heath completed the sentence.

"Has the fellow dared to make love to you?" he demanded.

"He has been rather inclined to become sentimental," she told him; "but please let me go on with my story."

"I am sorry," Heath kept his rising temper in check.

"There was another man here that night—Mr. Moses Grinstead, who is a solicitor. Mr. Grinstead is

a most unpleasant type also. You will begin to think that this is a regular Chamber of Human Horrors," added the girl.

"You do appear to have rather a choice collection. What are this Mr. Moses Grinstead's pet peculiarities?"

"He is old and tries to be fatherly; but I am convinced he is sly and scheming. Uncle is inclined to think a great deal of him, however, because Mr. Grinstead used to be the family lawyer for the Coxonfield family, from the last of whom uncle inherited this property."

Heath nodded.

"That's understandable, of course," he said.

"That night, owing to the awful weather, both Mr. Grinstead and Mr. Voyce stayed at the Hall. My uncle had invited them to dinner in order to welcome me back from London.

"After dinner, for some reason which I could not understand, Mr. Voyce and the solicitor started arguing about the ghost which is supposed to haunt Doone Hall and this particular part of the Moor."

"Ghost?" He pretended not to understand.

"Yes"—she shivered—"it's rather a horrible kind, too—a vampire."

"Nonsense!" But even as he scoffed, Heath had a disturbing memory.

"That's what uncle says. But—I don't know. I've seen something flying. . . ."

"You have? By Jove! When?"

"Oh, several nights ago."

"Outside the house, you mean?"

"Yes. It—it passed my window. I sleep in the West Tower."

"Then it was the light in your room that I saw last night?"

"Last night? Oh yes, I couldn't sleep. I lit a lamp and tried to read."

Heath pulled out his cigarette-case.

"Will you smoke?"

"No, thanks—but please do yourself."

As he struck a match, she continued: "After dinner that night—when I returned from Town—Mr. Grinstead, against my uncle's wishes, told the story. Briefly, because it's very horrible, it appeared that over a hundred years ago one of the Coxonfields, after returning here from abroad, was suspected of terrible practices. He was killed by a local doctor and a number of helpers who were determined to rid the district of such a monster, and they buried him in a cellar beneath this house. Although his heart was pierced by a stake this Vernon Coxonfield is now said to haunt this district in the form of a vampire."

"It is certainly an amazing story, Miss Garrett, but Dartmoor has many strange legends. Time only adds to their horrors, so I would not think about it too much." How could he tell her that, not many hours before, he himself had seen this ghastly apparition?

"I dare say every countryside has them. I remember stories when I was a girl in America . . . but, as I said, I have actually seen something which looked like a monstrous bat fly past my window. However, I have strayed from my point; the incident that night concerns something else. Disturbed in the night I went downstairs. In the passage which leads to my uncle's laboratory I was frightened by a man—a man who had—how can I hope to convince you?—only half a face."

"It sounds nightmarish."

"It was. I'm sorry to say I fainted."

"And no wonder. We shall have to try to put salt on this gentleman's tail."

"You don't believe me?" she asked, thinking he was mocking her.

"Miss Garrett, I am prepared to believe anything about this house after what you have told me. It is no good my suggesting that you should leave Doone Hall, I suppose?"

She shook her head.

"So long as my uncle continues to live here I cannot leave."

Heath finished his cigarette.

"Then I want you to promise that you won't mind my butting-in."

"How can I begin to thank you?" She half turned away because her eyes were wet with tears.

THE TELEGRAM

THE morning air was crisp and exhilarating as Heath walked back to Four Ways Cottage, but the keen, clean wind could not blow his misgivings away. He had stumbled, he felt sure, upon something unique in the way of crime.

Part of it was clear enough. A scientist working on an invention which might have enormous potential value, and living in one of the loneliest spots of England. Here was a fact highly interesting to a large number of people. In spite of all the pacific humbug and rot that was being talked, a man like himself had the best of reasons for knowing that the cauldron of war in Europe was being piled high with combustible material. It was conceivable that in these circumstances Warren Murdoch might be surrounded by men who could be styled enemies.

But—he stopped whilst debating the point—could a

supposed vampire and a man who possessed only half a face be included amongst them?

"The morning has tempted you, I see, Mr. Gavin!"

Heath wheeled swiftly. He hadn't heard anyone approaching and he hated to be taken unawares.

The man he had been discussing with Cicely Garrett not an hour before stood smiling at him.

"Good morning, Mr. —" He pretended to forget the name.

"Voyce—Philip Voyce."

"Oh, of course. You're a neighbour of my friend Hartsgill. You called the night before last, didn't you? How stupid of me." The speaker shook his head in reproach.

"And how is Mr. Hartsgill?"

"Very well—but very busy. I left him starting work on a new poem. The cottage isn't very large at the best of times, but when the Muse descends upon my friend there seems scarcely room for the three of us. At least, that appeared the case this morning, and so I left Hartsgill to it."

Voyce was very understanding.

"I am a writer myself, and I know how nervy a man like Mr. Hartsgill possibly becomes when a genuine inspiration comes to him. You do not write yourself, Mr. Gavin?"

The other laughed.

"I'm in the coal trade," he stated; "nothing romantic, or even very interesting, about that, but it's a steady going business and it suits me."

Voyce joined in the laugh.

"You are fortunate not to be bothered by the artistic temperament, Mr. Gavin. But I do not think that you will find much coal on Dartmoor."

"No, I suppose not." He laughed again. "As a

matter of fact, I've been working rather hard and thought I would give myself a bit of a holiday. So I accepted the invitation of my old friend Hartsgill to share his cottage for a week or two."

"You'll find Dartmoor somewhat lonely, I am afraid. One hasn't many neighbours to call on in such a place as this. I, myself, however, shall be pleased to see you and Mr. Hartsgill whenever you feel like dropping in."

"That's very kind of you—and I shall certainly avail myself of the opportunity before I return to Cheltenham."

"Well, don't forget. I can promise you only Spartan fare, I am afraid, but there's generally some whisky on tap. Be sure you come."

The two parted on apparently excellent terms, but the self-styled coal merchant from Cheltenham gnawed the stem of his pipe as he walked on. This Voyce fellow was certainly a very pertinacious cove, and he had a nasty habit of cropping up at the most unexpected moments. He would decidedly accept the invitation to call on the blighter.

A quarter of a mile off from Four Ways Cottage, Heath espied a bulky person scanning the countryside. He had no difficulty in recognizing Jerry Hartsgill. The poet, once his imperfect vision had focused the wanderer, rushed tempestuously forward.

"Where in the Flaming Tin Hat have you been?" he blazed.

"One question, Jerry," replied Ian Heath; "have you finished that poem yet?"

"I'm halfway through it. Sat up all night. Thought you were as snug as a bug in a rug. Called up: 'What about a bite of brekker?' Got no answer. Went wanking upstairs. No sign of the honest guest. Got the wind up. Where in the hell have you been?"

"All in good time, old man. Let's get on inside before I tell you."

"Afraid of being overheard?" scoffed the other.

"I don't mind telling you, Jerry, I'm afraid of a number of things just about now—the two most important being a vampire and a man with half a face."

"Half a face me aunt's pyjamas; You've been looking at the moon, young feller. But come on in; I thought bringing you down here would keep you out of mischief—and it looks like it!"

Although Ian had breakfasted well, the walk across the Moor had made him hungry again, and he followed his host's example by stowing away a second edition of bacon and eggs, washed down by two cups of really excellent coffee.

"If you hadn't got the worst part of the new poem over I wouldn't open my mouth," he said, when the meal was ended, "because what I'm going to say will require your undivided attention."

Jerry stared over his fuming pipe.

"Get on with it," he rejoined.

The recital over, the listener emitted a loud "Phew!" "And you came down here for peace and quiet! But so far as my wind and stomach and rotten eyes will permit I'm with you to the limit. But what's to be done?"

"We shall have to decide," was the answer.

For so long as was possible, Cicely watched the receding figure of the man who had offered her friendship and help. When it had disappeared over the rim of the distant hill she turned round to find Neale standing by her side.

"A telegram, miss."

The sight of this man always made her skin tingle.

"I did not hear you enter, Neale," she said coldly. "You know I always like to hear you knock before you come into a room."

"I beg your pardon, miss, but I did knock. I knocked twice, but received no answer. I presume, miss, that you were so engaged that you did not hear me."

Ignoring the explanation she took the orange envelope and looked at the address.

"But this has been sent to my uncle."

"I was afraid the master would be annoyed if I took it to him. When he went to the laboratory early this morning he gave me strict instructions that he was not to be disturbed.

Cicely knew this to be true and the fact made her speak a trifle more kindly.

"All right, Neale, I will see to it." The man bowed and left.

She handled the envelope nervously. This was the first telegram that had been received at Doone Hall since her arrival. With feminine dread she had always disliked receiving telegrams; they had become associated in her mind with things of dread. Could this one contain fresh trouble?

Conquering her fear, she went to her uncle's laboratory and knocked on the door.

"It's Cicely," she announced. "A telegram has come for you, uncle, and Neale brought it to me."

There was a muttered exclamation, and then the door was opened.

"Come in, my dear," said Warren Murdoch.

She entered a large, bare room littered with scientific apparatus which had no significance for her untutored eyes.

"A telegram, you say," commented the scientist. He spoke abstractedly as usual.

"Yes, uncle, here it is," she replied, handing it to him.

He tore open the envelope, scanned the contents, and then turned to her with a smile.

"I've good news," he remarked. "This wire is from Professor Sapford, of London University. He is a very old friend of mine. I wrote him recently, asking if he could possibly spare a few days to come down and see me. Now he wires to say he will be here for the week-end."

"Then that means to-night. I will see Mrs. Neale. We must get a room ready."

Her uncle smiled.

"I am afraid my old friend Sapford is rather eccentric; for instance, he states in his telegram that he must sleep out of doors."

"Out of doors in October—and on Dartmoor!"

"I know, I know—but Sapford has always been—well, unusual. He must be very particular about it, or he wouldn't make the stipulation in his telegram. I know he is an authority on the human respiratory system amongst many other things—he is engaged at the moment in conducting some breathing experiments upon himself—but beyond that I cannot say. You will do your best, Cicely?"

"Of course, uncle. But when he says out of doors, he surely doesn't mean that he intends sleeping on the ground?"

"How can I say, child?" quickly replied the scientist; "I scarcely think even Sapford would go to that limit. But I dare not offend him, apart altogether from our long friendship. You must do what you consider is best, my dear."

The frown left the girl's forehead.

"There is the summer-house place in the grounds, of course," she said; "it is very dirty, but perhaps the

Neales could give it a thorough cleaning and make it sleepable."

"Excellent," declared Murdoch, who, after the manner of a man, saw the problem solved. "I knew you would be able to manage." He put a hand on her shoulder. "Sapford is coming to confer with me on my invention, Cicely. He has one of the finest scientific minds in the country, and I think I shall surprise him —I really think I shall." He chuckled like a schoolboy about to spring a joke.

Cicely was unable to share in his good humour. The mention of the invention sent a cold wave through her.

"Have you nearly finished it, uncle?"

"What? My invention? Yes, it is practically finished, and I believe it will exceed all my expectations." He was talking enrapturedly, his eyes bright. "Sapford will be able to give an authoritative opinion. He has influence, too, with the authorities, and it may be—it may be, Cicely, my dear—that the name of Murdoch will be remembered with honour. When the next war comes——"

She interrupted him.

"There won't be another war, surely, uncle? There can't be. The nations would never allow it. America——"

"When the next war comes, as come it must in the light of present events America will be so involved herself that she will have neither the time nor the inclination to play the policeman to Europe. Your great nation, Cicely, will be fully occupied in fighting for her existence."

"But what can possibly cause another war?"

"What causes war, Cicely?" repeated Warren Murdoch. "Many things, my dear—but principally human nature. So long as there are human beings inhabiting this earth, so long will there be wars—nothing

can prevent them. Elaborate international tribunals may be set up, conferences held—pshaw! so much eye-wash; for all our civilisation humanity remains primitive beneath the surface, and the instinct of the primitive creature is to fight for what it desires."

"It's a very depressing philosophy, uncle."

"I dare say, but it is the truth. And the truth is often a most depressing fact. However, I do not intend to give you further cause for despondency; I wish you to share my satisfaction in knowing that, whilst it is impossible for mankind to avert war, yet it is possible for a person like myself, given the patience and the good fortune, to invent something which may prove of incalculable value to his country when war does come."

With that she had to be content, but for some hours afterwards her mood was one of dejection. She had the feeling that Warren Murdoch's invention, of which he had such hopes, was destined to bring disaster upon all who lived at Doone Hall.

WARREN MURDOCH SHOWS EXCITEMENT

Warren Murdoch elected to do a very unusual thing that afternoon. In the ordinary course of events, he never stirred outside the grounds of the small mansion he had inherited, but after tea he announced his intention of going himself to meet his old friend at Tavistock Station.

"I shall leave you to look after the laboratory and see that no one breaks into it," he said in a tone of semi-jocularity to Cicely. She had never known him in such a good humour; he even joked with Neale as the butler, who was to drive the battered old Ford, helped him on with his coat.

It was not a pleasant prospect. Her uncle would be gone at least an hour, and the responsibility weighed on her. But there was one fact which gave her relief —Neale would be out of the way.

Dusk soon came. She had left the dinner preparations to Mrs. Neale and remained literally on guard.

But during that time of tension, nothing happened. The house gave forth no more spectres. It furnished no fresh terrors. Nevertheless, it was with a distinct feeling of relief that Cicely heard the return of the ancient car.

She hastened into the hall to have her hands seized by her uncle.

"Now tell me, my dear fellow, what you think of my little housekeeper?" Warren Murdoch inquired, turning to the man who had entered just behind him.

Professor Joshua Sapford, of whom the inquiry was made, was a tall, stout man of about fifty. He had a thick neck, noticeably florid complexion—which the drive across the Moor had turned a deep purplish hue —and thick-lensed spectacles.

"If this young lady's domestic virtues are anything in keeping with her charming appearance, I can only say, my dear Murdoch, that you are to be most heartily congratulated." The words were said in a rich, ringing voice which seemed to give warmth to the dark, gloom-ridden hall.

"You can depend upon Cicely doing her best to make you comfortable, Sapford," his host assured him.

"I am sure of that," replied the guest; "my word, Murdoch, you have a regular baronial mansion here. But doesn't all this dark oak stuff get on your nerves sometimes?" He looked round the hall with an expression of doubt.

"I haven't noticed anything," replied Murdoch; "but a little gloom in furnishing shouldn't affect any-

one like yourself, my dear fellow, who persists in sleeping out of doors. Personally, I prefer dark oak to earwigs!"

The visitor joined in the laugh which his host started and, after a tour of the house, professed himself delighted with everything he saw. What was more important from Cicely's point of view, he declared that the somewhat ramshackle summer-house, which had been hurriedly prepared for his reception, would suit him admirably.

"This fad of mine is purely a question of health, my dear Miss Garrett," he explained. "I have not been very well for some time, and the Harley Street specialist whom I consulted supported my own belief that I should derive benefit from sleeping out of doors. I followed this practice throughout the summer, and am endeavouring to school myself to doing it all the year round."

"I do hope you will be comfortable, professor." She was not qualified to express any view in the matter: it appeared to be courting disaster, in the biting air of Dartmoor, but, of course, it was no concern of hers.

Some doubt may have been expressed in her face, for Sapford smiled at her, remarking: "Now don't you worry about me, Miss Garrett—I shall be perfectly all right."

Dinner was announced early, and afterwards Warren Murdoch dragged his visitor off to the laboratory. Not that Professor Sapford required much persuasion: all through the meal the two scientists had been talking interminably in a jargon which was pure Greek to the girl, and immediately after coffee, which was served in the dining-room, the men arose.

"You will excuse us, my dear," said her uncle. His face was flushed, and the hand he had placed on Professor Sapford's sleeve trembled.

It was long past midnight before they returned to the drawing-room, where Cicely had been endeavouring to keep awake over one of those puerile modern novels which are all talk and soul-analysis and no action or story. She threw the thing aside as her uncle entered.

"My dear, congratulate me!" Warren Murdoch said, in a tone which from her knowledge was entirely strange to him; "my old friend Sapford has listened to all I have had to say and he declares himself as being perfectly satisfied that my confidence is justified."

"Oh, uncle, I'm ever so glad!" She ran to the gratified inventor and kissed him in congratulation.

"Yes, Miss Garrett, your uncle has wrought wonders—in fact, he has accomplished a modern miracle," supported Professor Sapford; "the thing must have a practical test, however, but we shall arrange that tomorrow. In the meantime"—and he turned quickly to his host—"I trust that your laboratory has a good, stout lock on its door?"

Warren Murdoch nodded.

"You need have no worry on that account."

"It's just as well. One hears strange stories of attempted burglaries when things of such national importance as this invention of yours are at stake, Murdoch."

Cicely could not stop herself breaking in.

"That is what I keep on trying to make uncle understand," she said earnestly; "only he hasn't taken any notice up till now."

"Well, well, I should worry. It is extremely unlikely that anyone in such a remote spot as this would have the slightest idea of the value of such an instrument even if it was explained to them."

Cicely knew she could have replied very effectively

to this—why had Moses Grinstead been trying to look into the laboratory, and what did the presence in the passage outside of the man with the half-face convey? —but it was very late and she was awfully tired. The day had been an eventful one and she had neither the mental nor the physical strength to wrestle with any more problems.

After seeing Professor Sapford safely on his way to his strange bedroom, piloted by Neale, she wished her uncle good-night and went upstairs.

One thought upheld her: the next day she would write to Ian Heath (addressing the envelope "Ronald Gavin," of course!), and say that she must see him immediately.

A VISIT OF INSPECTION

Ian Heath chuckled—rather grimly.

"It's no good, Jerry," he said, "I must go on this trip alone."

"Curse it, you're always going alone," growled the poet; "what's the matter with taking me along for a change?"

"This," replied his friend; "I want you here in case Voyce should call. If he does call, you can tell a white little lie and say I am (1) in bed with a slight chill, or (2) that I am in Tavistock spending the night."

"What's the point?" angrily retorted Hartsgill.

"The point, O flat-footed one, is that I am not taking any more chances than are necessary with this fellow Voyce—which, I am willing to bet, isn't his real name by a jugful. It will probably sound conceited, but I'm not at all sure that Voyce isn't wise to who I am. The *Daily Miracle* has a fairly wide

circulation, something like a million and three-quarters every morning, and, as Miss Garrett saw my mug displayed so lavishly, it is equally possible that Philip Voyce's eyes were dazzled by the same ravishing sight. You follow so far?"

"You're talking a hell of a lot," conceded his listener.

Heath disregarded the rudeness, and continued to explain what was in his mind.

"I don't trust Voyce," he said, "and it is equally certain that he does not trust me. No doubt he intends to watch me as I hope to watch him."

"He has invited you over to his shack," put in Hartsgill.

"Quite so, but if you had half the intelligence of a rabbit you would understand that that is merely a blind on his part. He professes friendship whilst all the time thirsting to do me dirt. When we call he will be the perfect host; he will be as smooth as the pathway to the Naughty Place, where you will certainly go, Jerry, my lad, unless you improve your ways. But that will not be the real or the true Philip Voyce; neither shall I see the real cottage. Any little secrets he may have concealed about the place will be carefully hidden away."

"You think with me, then, that he is a dead wrong 'un?"

"I am not going to be so precipitate or so sweeping as that, Jerry, because as yet I haven't proof. But this I will say: the fellow who calls himself Philip Voyce is not a normal man. He is abnormal in more ways than one unless I am wrong in my guess."

"Suppose he happens to be in the cottage when you get there?"

Heath shrugged.

"Then my five mile walk will have been wasted."

"Won't you go in?"

"Not on your life. That would be showing my hand—and I do not intend to show my hand—yet. If Voyce is home when I arrive, and I hope to be able to ascertain the fact without his knowing it, I shall noiselessly decamp and return home with a whale of an appetite."

"And if he is not?"

"Then I intend to have a quiet looksee round his abode. Keep the fire in, Jerry, and try to cultivate the virtue of patience. When things really get going—and I don't think the time is too far ahead—I promise you shall be in this thing up to the neck. That good enough?"

"All right," growled the other, almost reconciled to his unattractive rôle. "Will you take Lizzie?"

Heath wheeled on him.

"I will *not* take Lizzie; nor will I allow Lizzie to take me. What do you imagine I should be like out on the Moor, with Voyce possibly snooping around, carried to destruction by a foul-smelling, rotten-gutted motor-bike? I hate being unchivalrous, but I have no use for Lizzie."

"Please yourself, and——"

"And—what?" asked Heath.

Jerry Hartsgill raised his voice.

"For the Lord's sake, take care of yourself!" he boomed, endeavouring vainly to hide his anxiety.

"The real stuff, aren't you, Jerry?" smiled his friend, a hand on the tweed shoulder.

"Oh, get to hell out of here!" cried the other. Heath, grinning, obeyed.

Dusk had fallen an hour before, and now the Moor was wrapped in a purplish mantle, fascinating and yet eerie. But the stars had begun to appear and by these

Heath took his direction, walking with a sure-footedness that counteracted the treacherousness of the going.

His unfailing instinct for locality enabled him to keep a straight course, and not much more than an hour had passed before he slackened his businesslike pace.

Afraid to use his electric torch, he bent lower. This must be the rough track which Jerry had mentioned as leading to the cottage.

Another fifty yards brought him to a gate. Beyond this he could see a fairly presentable winding path, wide enough for a small car, which was the approach to this rough moorland dwelling.

He ignored the gate. In that impressive stillness, the slightest sound might easily be heard by anyone in the cottage, especially if that person had trained his senses always to be on the alert. Besides, although he had not mentioned the animal, Voyce might possibly keep a dog.

There was a crude wall, composed, he found, of stones placed in more or less haphazard fashion, one on top of the other, running round the strip of garden. He vaulted lightly over this.

He approached the cottage bent double. There was no light visible, but experience taught him not to take anything for granted with a man he suspected as much as he did Philip Voyce.

Ten minutes later he was inside the place. He had done a good deal in that short time. To begin with, he had ascertained that the car was not in the shed-like garage. Luck was evidently with him. Still, he could not be too sure.

A few minutes afterwards he was positive that Voyce was not at home; and so, using one of the neat little arrangements he had found useful in breaking

into what the police courts called "enclosed premises," he quietly entered the cottage.

The room into which he cautiously stepped proved to be the kitchen. This was neatly arranged, and the contents were clean. Evidently the owner was one of those bachelors who could be depended upon to look after themselves. The stone floor shone beneath the light of his electric torch.

Opening the heavy door, he looked into a sitting-room furnished with some degree of comfort. A large grandfather clock stood against the wall opposite to the window which he faced. To his right, as he stepped into the room, was the old-fashioned open hearth fireplace upon which logs were still smouldering. A good supply of fresh fuel lay waiting in an ingle-nook. Apparently Voyce had not long departed.

A large easy-chair by the side of this comfortable hearth invited rest, but Heath passed on.

What interested him particularly was a huge writing-desk placed immediately beneath the window. This was of the roll-top variety. Before he had gone out, Voyce had pulled the protecting cover down, had intended to lock it, no doubt, but had left the key in.

The sight of that key was a sore temptation. A man of fine personal scruples, Heath hesitated over a nice problem in ethics: was he justified in rifling the desk of a man he instinctively distrusted, but against whom he had as yet no direct proof?

Finally, he compromised: he would make a tour of the rest of the cottage first. Even this concession he condemned mentally as being absurd, but he walked across the room to a door on the left of the grandfather clock. The cottage being a single-storied building, the room which he was now going to visit must be where Voyce slept.

The bare, if comfortable living-room was Spartan-

like compared to the furnishing of the bedroom. This might have been a girl's room instead of a man's—and an exotically-minded girl at that. It was full of fripperies. Upon the dressing-table were a host of toilet articles, the examination of which caused Heath first to smile and then to become very serious. What he had imagined about Philip Voyce was true then. Here, in this over-elaborate bedroom, were the unmistakable signs of a perversion of thought which was noxious to a healthy-minded man.

Heath, although he disliked the job, no longer had any scruples about making his investigations. That scent-filled bedroom was subjected to the closest examination. When the search was concluded, he whistled softly. Although he could not see daylight yet, Heath was decidedly of the opinion that his visit had not been wasted.

Left alone, Jerry Hartsgill did what most disgruntled men do—he lit a pipe and brooded darkly.

Why had that ass Heath left him to mess about like this? Why hadn't the fellow allowed him to go along? Hartsgill, picking up what once might have been a cushion, hurled it viciously across the room. He knew what the trouble was: he had been meant for a life of action—that brief taste of it when he had done his bit to get Jimmy Stevenson out of a hole had been intoxicating—but here he was condemned to write rotten poetry and raise beastly hens. . . .

Was it blood-pressure or merely excitement bred out of the happenings of the past few days? Dashed if he knew, but there was the steady conviction that if he didn't plunk someone on the nose quite soon he would go up in flames. He felt just like that. Hell! He couldn't scrap with Heath, and, apart from pulling the cottage down, there seemed absolutely nothing by

which he could let off steam. Of course, he could kill a few fowls, but there was nothing heroic about slaughtering hens. . . .

There are times when even tobacco will not give a man solace. Jerry, in his distemper, had stuffed his pipe carelessly. Match after match was wasted, and then, angrily tapping the bowl out, he rose.

He would get Lizzie going and follow Heath. The silly devil might have lost his way . . . a hundred things could have happened. Voyce had perhaps waylaid him. Knocked him on the head. He could have fallen down a rabbit-hole—oh, a thousand things!

Hartsgill had his hand on the door when he stopped. No, he couldn't do that. He had his orders, and he must obey them. Heath would be annoyed if he didn't. Funny devil, Heath: he could flare up in a minute.

He supposed there was something in Ian's idea—about having his tracks covered should Voyce call—but it was perishingly dull waiting here. He'd try to write, only his mind was too disordered, too full of fancies which clashed. The only subject about which he felt he could have written at that moment was a prize-fight at the National Sporting Club.

He must wait, he supposed—filling in the time as best he could. Well, there was always food. . . . Yet even that avenue of escape was denied him: he wasn't hungry himself he discovered, and it was no use cooking the bacon and eggs until Heath returned: the stuff wouldn't be worth eating.

Resigning himself to the inevitable, Jerry resumed his seat by the fire and picked up his pipe again. This time he filled it with more care.

With the tobacco behaving itself, he fell to musing. His memory bridged the years that divided the present from the days when Ian Heath and he had been at Repington together. What a time Heath had had since

then! Adventures in practically every part of Europe! There was something fine and splendid in being the pal, the trusted pal, of a chap like that.

And now, just as though mystery and danger drew him like twin-magnets, here was Heath plunged up to his neck in another amazing affair—an affair in which he, too, was going to have a hand before much longer.

But suppose Heath was snuffed out before he could really get going—what then? He had taken a risk two or three nights back when starting off to catch a glimpse of the vampire, but he had taken a bigger one, perhaps, to-night. That fellow Voyce——

Suddenly the real drama of the situation struck him. By Jingo! it was like a play! There was something deeper and more real than mere personal dislike between Heath and the man whose cottage he had gone to visit. *They were both in love with the same girl!*

Cripes! What a fool he had been not to have tumbled to it before! The thing had been staring him in the face for days—as plain as mud! He remembered the stiffening of Heath's jaw when he had told him about Cicely Garrett. Love at first sight for old Ian! Wonders would never cease. Here was a cove who had mixed, hob-nobbed and what-notted with some of the most beautiful women in Europe and never turned a hair. And now he was for it. . . . Well, well! Personally he had always found sufficient of the feminine character in hens not to want to bother about women, but there it was: the strongest and best—it was only a question of time.

But Heath had a dirty dog to fight—there was no doubt about that. He might be prejudiced on account of the wig, but there must be some very real reason why three people—Cicely Garrett, Ian, and himself—should all have formed an instant distrust of the man. Not that Cicely Garrett's dislike would influence

Voyce himself—he was the type who would not scruple to take what he wanted.

Jerry, his nerves on edge, left his chair. A recollection of a hate-consumed face had come back to him. He recalled the moment on the night of Ian Heath's arrival when Ian had handed the wig back to Philip Voyce. At the time the incident had seemed amusing, although the humour had a sardonic edge to it, but now the memory made him grit his teeth. Voyce had looked as though he could have killed the Secret Service man.

No doubt he would if he got the chance. And what better chance could he have than finding his enemy unexpectedly in his cottage. It would be so easy to shoot first, and explain afterwards that he had taken the visitor to be a burglar. Dwellers in lonely, desolate places like Dartmoor were permitted by public opinion to own weapons, and any local jury would acquit a man who killed in protection of his own property.

The picture came of his old pal lying dead on an uneven floor . . . with the face of his killer gloating over him.

He couldn't stand that! The torment was unendurable. Whether Heath was angry or not, he would have to get Lizzie out and trek over to Voyce's cottage. There might be devil's work going on there . . . it might already have been done. . . .

He pushed a shapeless cap upon his head and thrust his arms into the dirtiest mackintosh in Devonshire. Nothing else being available, he picked up the short poker from the hearth and rammed it into a pocket. Rushing to the door, he flung it open.

A pitch-black darkness faced him. There was a tense silence. He stood for a few moments straining his ears to catch any sound.

Out on the right a thing stirred. He could not tell if it was man or animal.

The next second something solid pinged into the stout wooden door. It had passed so close that he felt his forehead scorched.

He shook with the thought that he was near to death: some swine was trying to shoot him.

JERRY GOES IN SEARCH

Jerry Hartsgill burst into an explosive "Hell!" Someone lurking out there to the right had undoubtedly shot at him with intent to kill. Indeed, the bullet had been so close that it had actually grazed his forehead.

Even a sarcastic reviewer always made the poet see red; and now that he was confronted by a potential murderer, he literally boiled over with rage. Only a spasm of caution inherited from a Scottish aunt on his mother's side prevented him from rushing forward blindly.

"No, that won't do," he muttered; "the blighter would start popping again—and this time he probably wouldn't miss."

So he retreated.

Closing the door quietly behind him, he put the wooden bar into position and went through the cottage. Less than a minute later he had crept out through the back way. The poker was clutched firmly in his right hand. Jerry may have looked a somewhat comic figure of vengeance, but he had the feelings of a Chinese torturer. He may have possessed bowels of compassion at one time, but he certainly did not possess them now: he looked forward to tearing the joker with the revolver apart with his bare hands. That was after the poker had done the preliminary work.

It must be stated that Jerry probably would not

have passed the Boy Scouts' final examination in field-craft. Apart from his heavy breathing, due to his thirst for vengeance, he twice fell over stones and three times rotten sticks snapped beneath his fourteen-stone tread.

It wasn't perhaps surprising, therefore, that when he finally reached the spot where he had imagined his unknown enemy to be, the place was deserted.

Hartsgill stamped about like an enraged bull, bursting through the gorse-bushes behind which the man had evidently been hiding, and cursing his lot. He had made up his mind to capture the fellow—and now he was gone!

Gone—where? This query sank into insignificance by the side of the other question he now asked himself. Who was the man? Apart altogether from the fact that he hadn't an enemy in the world so far as he knew, the sparse population of the Moor did not allow much speculation.

Could it be Voyce? And if so, what was his object? The next time he met the hound he'd tackle him about it straightaway. And if he didn't furnish an absolutely cast-iron explanation of where he was that particular night, he'd jump on him.

There was one consolation. If the man was Voyce, this meant that Ian Heath had had a safe passage—the fellow could not be in two places at once.

But it was a nasty feeling being potted at like that. Dash it, it made one feel like a rabbit. Suppose the brute was still about?

Jerry made one more tour of the neighbourhood, using what caution was possible to a person of his temperament. His good resolution in this respect was somewhat marred by his losing his glasses when creeping forward on his hands and knees. It was a habit of this particular pair of pince-nez—falling off and disappearing just when they were least expected to.

Eventually he found the blighters. But, replacing them on his nose, Jerry discovered that a slug had attached itself firmly to one of the lenses. . . . This not only caused further delay, but would have disclosed Hartsgill's presence to anyone within a distance of, say, one hundred yards. The poet's impassioned rhetoric would have delighted a connoisseur.

The slug removed, something approaching calmness returned. The best thing he could do, decided Hartsgill, was to get back to the cottage. Perhaps the shot had been merely a blind on the part of the fellow to draw him away. Not that there was much worth burgling in the old shack, apart from . . . Lizzie.

Lizzie!

Heath could scoff and jeer, but he didn't realize the sterling worth of Lizzie. Lizzie might be old, but she was the right stuff.

The thought that she possibly was in danger, that alien legs might even now be bestriding the motor-bike's worn saddle, caused Hartsgill to plunge back at headlong speed towards the cottage.

The first thing he did was to ascertain that Lizzie was still in the lean-to garage. That done and the door relocked, he turned his attention elsewhere.

The cottage was as he had left it. No one had disturbed anything. If the man intended to do the burglar-stunt, he must have postponed the attempt.

Jerry did not relight the lamp. Light seemed dangerous in the circumstances; he didn't require any more pot-shots. In his zeal he even threw water on the fire. Although the curtains were drawn, a flame could be reflected to the outside world.

Once he rose hurriedly from his seat by the now evil-smelling hearth and picked up the poker again. Was that something prowling about outside?

He tiptoed across the floor and lifted the bottom of

the window-curtain. Yes, there was a shadow. . . .

Mr. Murderer! Well, he would be ready for him! The fellow was now apparently trying the front door. He would slip the protecting wooden bar back, fling the door suddenly open, rush out——

All of which he did, only to hear a voice he knew exclaim: "What the thunder's up? Gone mad or something?" The man he had mistaken for the would-be assassin was merely Ian Heath back from his travels! A disgruntled, critical, inclined-to-be-overbearing Ian Heath.

"What's the tremendous notion?" he demanded. "Place all in darkness, so that I nearly broke my neck; you rushing out, arms working like windmills, so that I nearly got my head knocked off; and a stink that turns the stomach over! Got any reasonable explanation?" striding into the living-room. "And, Holy Joe! the fire's out!" he cried, flinging up his hands.

Jerry, after gulping several times, found his voice.

"Perhaps you would have been better pleased if you had come home to find a corpse littering up the doorway?—because that is what nearly happened."

"What's that, Jerry?" Heath asked in a different tone; "anything happened here while I was gone, old man?"

"Some cove did his best to put a revolver-bullet through me while I was standing at the door about twenty minutes ago—if that's anything. That's why I didn't light up again—and why the fire's out; but I'll soon have it going."

"Not yet, Jerry, old son—just sit down quietly and tell me everything that happened. It's important. And I was only ragging just now."

"I knew that," replied the other, mollified. "After you had been gone a couple of hours or so I began to get the wind up, imagining that all sorts of horrors

had happened to you. Finally, I couldn't stick it any longer, and I decided to get Lizzie out and come to fetch you."

"Against orders, Jerry."

"Oh, hang it, I know that. But, as I say, I began picturing all sorts of things, and I felt I wanted action. I had got to the front door, and was just looking out before starting for the garage when something pinged into the wood just over my face. As a matter of fact, the bullet—I'll show it to you in a minute—grazed my forehead.

"I lost my temper, as you may imagine. But when I got to the bunch of gorse-bushes from where the shot seemed to come, there was no one there. I made a pretty good search, you can bet, but the fellow must have hopped it pretty quickly after firing. No, I didn't dream it, old boy—come and see for yourself."

Sure enough, deeply embedded in the upper part of the stout oak door was a bullet, evidently fired from a revolver.

"What does it mean?" asked Hartsgill.

"It means," was the slow reply, "that we are dealing with a man who will stop at nothing—not even murder. No, I don't think for a moment that he intended killing you, Jerry—it was me he was after."

"Who's 'he'?"

"That remains to be seen, old man. And now let's have some grub, and I'll tell you my story; it's worth listening to—in a way."

THE SERPENT'S TONGUE

Cicely had written her note to "Ronald Gavin." Now that the morning had come, it appeared increasingly necessary that Ian Heath should know about

Professor Sapford's visit and the opinion he had expressed concerning Warren Murdoch's invention. The note despatched by a tradesman who was making a call at Four Ways Cottage, she felt more easy in her mind.

Carrying an oblong case, which he handled with extreme care, her uncle, accompanied by Sapford, left the house immediately after breakfast in the ancient Ford. Although he said nothing to her, she inferred that the practical test of the invention which he had mentioned the night before was about to be staged.

The two scientists did not return until late in the afternoon. Both were jubilant.

"Food, Cicely—food in large quantities," cried her uncle, his eyes twinkling. "Sapford and I have not had as much as a malted-milk tablet since we left home this morning."

The time was six o'clock—no hour as regards meals, and so a compromise was made; what Murdoch called a "high tea" being served. It seemed to Cicely to be a terrible jumble of food—steaks, chipped potatoes, apple tart, and—tea, but her uncle and his guest fell to with the appetites of hungry schoolboys, and the unusual jocularity of the men lit up the grim old dining-room.

The three of them were in the middle of the meal when a visitor was announced.

"Mr. Voyce has called, sir, and would like to see you at your convenience," stated Neale.

Professor Sapford looked up from his plate.

"May I inquire who Mr. Voyce is?" he asked of his host.

"He's a neighbour—quite a decent fellow," replied Murdoch. "Show Mr. Voyce into the library, Neale, and say that I will be with him soon."

"Very good, sir."

It was difficult for Cicely to go on eating. The very presence of Philip Voyce in the house was disturbing. It upset her. The last time they met she had practically quarrelled with him, and yet here he was calling again as though nothing had happened.

When Neale had left to deliver the message, she said: "Uncle, I do wish you would instruct Neale to say we are not at home when Mr. Voyce calls."

"Nonsense, my dear! You seem to have an obsession about that young man. Voyce has been kindness itself to us on many occasions—how can you forget that? And have we so many neighbours that we can afford to lose the best of the lot?"

She remained impenitent.

"I do not like the man, and I have practically told him so. You must not expect me to entertain him."

Warren Murdoch appeared about to make an angry exclamation. Then, instead, he turned to his guest.

"You must excuse this little family argument, Sapford. This young man, Voyce, who lives a matter of six miles away, has been outrageous enough to fall in love with my niece——"

"Uncle, please," Cicely protested; "I cannot bear you saying it, even in jest."

The inventor shrugged his shoulders. The gesture was expressive. It said: "Who can deal with these women?"

Professor Sapford smiled across at the girl.

"I am sure, Miss Garrett, that your uncle will never wish you to do anything against your will—he is far too fond of you for that."

"Of course I am," supported Murdoch; "and being civil to a man is a far different thing from consenting to marry him."

No more was said on the subject, and as soon as possible, Murdoch left the room to discharge his duty.

He found Philip Voyce comfortably installed in the library.

"I must apologize for calling at such an awkward time," said the visitor, shaking hands; "but the truth is I felt I had to see you at the first opportunity." His tone was grave, and Murdoch's attention became immediately arrested.

"My dear fellow," he replied, "I trust you feel that you can call at Doone Hall whenever you like. We are neighbours, and in a spot like this——"

He was not allowed to proceed. Voyce appeared labouring under such a strong sense of excitement that he could not wait for the other to finish.

"In coming here to-night, Mr. Murdoch, I obeyed the dictates of my conscience. As you say, we are neighbours. That fact alone would have been sufficient for me, even if I had not experienced at your hands many personal kindnesses which I shall never be able to forget." The speaker, whose voice was still shaking with suppressed excitement, glanced towards the door. "What I am going to say is for your ears alone, Mr. Murdoch—I must ask you to regard the information as being strictly confidential. And, forgive me, but may I ascertain if anyone is listening outside that door?"

"My dear fellow!" again exclaimed his listener. Warren Murdoch was almost incoherent with astonishment. He had always regarded Philip Voyce as a very level-headed man, and yet he was now behaving in this extraordinary manner.

"There is no one listening," announced Voyce, returning to the centre of the room after opening the door and looking out; "now I feel I can talk freely. You must be warned, Mr. Murdoch."

"Warned!—against whom? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Listen, please." The speaker's manner was impressive. "Yesterday I was in London. I had to go up to see the firm of publishers who contemplate bringing out the book which I am now writing. Whilst lunching at the Savoy—I permit myself such a luxury on my rare visits to Town—I fell in with a man who holds a unique position at Scotland Yard. James Cartwright and I have been friends for some years—I was able to do him a service once in Vienna when he was hard pressed and, like the good chap he is, he has never forgotten it. I want you to understand that anything a man in Cartwright's position says can be relied upon," the speaker added, looking at his host fixedly.

"Naturally," commented Murdoch.

"Well, it was Cartwright who told me about the man who calls himself Ronald Gavin——"

"Ronald Gavin," interrupted the inventor. "That name is somehow familiar; now where have I come across it?"

"The man I refer to is living at the present time in a cottage called Four Ways about five miles from here across the Moor. He is staying with a drunken poet called Hartsgill. I dropped in on you to-night, Mr. Murdoch, to warn you against the man—according to Cartwright he's a dangerous character."

Murdoch started back.

"That is a very serious accusation to bring against anyone, Voyce; I needn't remind you of that, I feel sure."

"Cartwright, as I have already informed you, is not a man to speak without authority. He told me this in confidence, as one friend to another."

The inventor lit a cigarette.

"I remember now where I have heard the name," he said. "Two nights ago there was another mysterious occurrence here. I awoke suddenly by hearing a door

bang. Going downstairs I found my niece returning from the grounds. She had been disturbed, she said, and, showing great pluck, she went into the garden to find the cause. Here she discovered a young man in a state of collapse, who told a strange story. He said that whilst lost on the Moor outside the Hall he saw a man climbing the wall. Thinking the fellow was up to some mischief he followed him. The believed burglar became aware of his presence apparently and attacked him brutally, afterwards getting away. The young man who had so chivalrously attempted to defend my property spent the rest of the night at the Hall. He told me his name was Ronald Gavin."

Fire flashed from Voyce's eyes.

"Do you mean to say that the fellow actually stayed here?"

"How could I prevent it? The man told a plausible story——"

"About a burglar in the middle of Dartmoor? What time was this?"

"When I came on the scene it was about two o'clock."

"And what, pray, was this Mr. Ronald Gavin doing outside Doone Hall, five miles from the cottage at which he is staying, at that time of the morning?"

"He stated that he had lost his way on the Moor."

Voyce laughed scornfully.

"A likely tale," he commented; "but surely you did not believe it?"

"At the time I did."

The other made an impatient gesture.

"But don't you see," he exclaimed, "that this only bears out Cartwright's description of the man as a dangerous crook? The story he told you was only a blind—used to get him inside the house and thus become familiar with the place. Didn't you once mention

to me that you were engaged on a rather important piece of work just now?"

"I have practically completed an invention which will cause a world-wide sensation when the news is released to the public," declared Murdoch. Naturally a modest man, his voice now rang with the pride of achievement.

"That explains everything," at once replied Voyce. "It seems to me extremely likely that Gavin may be the agent of a foreign Power. That, indeed, appears to be the only feasible explanation of his putting in an appearance in this desolate part of the world."

"He may have come here for a holiday," suggested Murdoch.

"Rubbish! Crooks do not take holidays—or if they do they choose a spot with some ulterior motive. It is no business of mine, but I thought I would give you the warning, Mr. Murdoch. What action you take must depend on yourself, of course."

"It sounds an impossible story, Voyce, but all the same I should like you to know that I feel very much indebted to you."

"You need have no sense of indebtedness, Mr. Murdoch; you would have done as much for me, I feel sure."

"Nevertheless, I am very much obliged to you. I don't mind admitting, Voyce, that if this invention of mine happens to get into the wrong hands the result would certainly be catastrophic—I dare not even contemplate the possibility."

"Is it generally known that you have been working on this thing?"

"Of course not. To have broadcast such a statement would have been disastrous from the first. Not only would it have attracted a great deal of undesirable attention, but there would have been other difficulties."

Philip Voyce nodded.

"I take it, Mr. Murdoch, that this invention of yours may be of some value?" he asked.

Murdoch forgot his usual impeccable manners sufficiently to snort.

"Value! Millions could not buy it," he retorted.

"Then may I suggest once again that it would be exceedingly unwise for you to continue to allow this man Gavin to visit your house?"

"You need not worry any further on that score, Voyce. I will leave instructions that if the man should call he will not be admitted. And I am very grateful to you for your help. Won't you stay and meet my friend, Professor Sapford, of the London University?"

Voyce hesitated. "Much as I should enjoy making the acquaintance of such a distinguished scientist, I am afraid I must deny myself the pleasure. I can speak quite frankly to you, I know, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will explain that matters are a trifle strained between Miss Garrett and myself. Unhappily, although I have searched my memory in vain for a reason, I appear to have offended her in some way. The last time we met she became rather heated—I gathered that she did not wish to see me again. That is why I intend to keep away in future."

"Nonsense, my boy! You mustn't talk like that. You know that girls often get unreasonable notions into their heads. But surely that is no reason why you should stay away from your friends." Warren Murdoch, grateful to the man for what he had done, spoke encouragingly.

"It is very good of you, but I must not intrude. If I might call, perhaps, some other time—then I should certainly like to have a talk with Professor Sapford. You two are old colleagues, I suppose?"

"He is my greatest friend—the one man in whom I have confided the secret of my invention," was the answer. "If the newspaper reporters could induce Sapford to speak when he returns to London he would have a startling story to tell."

"May I ask with what branch of science your invention deals, Mr. Murdoch?" The question was asked in the most non-committal of tones, but the inventor looked at the caller sharply.

"I am sorry, Voyce, but I am not at liberty to answer that," he replied.

The other nodded. "I shouldn't have asked. Sorry. . . . I meant no harm, you know. Thoughtless of me."

Murdoch took pity on the other's obvious confusion.

"Don't worry about it—but with a thing having such possibilities as this has proved to possess, the less it is talked about the better—for the country's sake."

"I quite understand. And I hope I am a sufficiently good Englishman and patriot to respect your judgment in the matter. For your own sake, however, let me congratulate you upon the satisfactory result of your labours. It must be very gratifying to know that the test of your invention has proved successful."

"It is," declared Murdoch, who did not pay the other's words the care he might have done. "The test was carried out on the Moor by Professor Sapford and myself only this afternoon and proved very successful. Later—" Then caution returned, and he withheld the further words.

"Just this one last remark, my dear host," observed Voyce; "you think that your friend, Professor Sapford, is absolutely trustworthy? Forgive me pointing out that, although to you, personally, money may not have any appeal, yet every man of scientific attainments does not share similar views. You have said that

your invention is worth millions. I pray you not to run any unnecessary risks."

Murdoch was so genuinely touched by the man's concern that he replied: "Sapford is absolutely to be trusted. Otherwise I should not have confided in him to such an extent. The secret is perfectly safe with him. You are sure you won't stay, Voyce?"

"Quite sure—but thank you all the same, Mr. Murdoch. Good-night."

THE WAKING HORROR

Cicely stamped her foot.

"I cannot understand how you had the patience to listen to such rubbish, uncle," she said: "for some purpose of his own, Philip Voyce has concocted this story about Mr. Gavin. No wonder he did not wait to see me—he knew what answer he would have received to his abominable lies."

Murdoch glanced at the clock. "It is late, and I have no wish to keep you from bed, Cicely, but I cannot quite understand why you should take up the cudgels for this perfect stranger in such a wholehearted fashion."

"I hate for anyone to have lies said about them. In that respect, at least, I am entirely British."

"But we do not know that they are lies. Mr. Voyce quoted a most reliable authority—a person named Cartwright, who occupies an important position at Scotland Yard."

"Haven't you ever heard of the devil quoting Scripture, uncle? I suppose Mr. Voyce suggested that the story of Mr. Gavin being attacked in the grounds was a concoction?"

"No, he did not go so far as that; but he suggested

that it was a somewhat strange circumstance that Mr. Gavin should be outside Doone Hall in the early hours of the morning."

"Mr. Gavin explained that he had lost his way on the Moor." Cicely's cheeks were flying banners of anger by this time.

Warren Murdoch placed his hand on the girl's shoulder. An unobservant man usually, he was conscious now that his niece was profoundly stirred.

"This is a very important matter, my dear, and I now appreciate all you have tried to tell me," he said gravely. "The invention which I have practically completed, if it comes through its other tests, as I believe it will, may be said to be almost beyond value, financially speaking. That makes it a most desirable object for any unscrupulous person to secure. Voyce, I am convinced, acted with the best possible motive. Happening to obtain some information which he thought I, as a friend as well as a neighbour, should know, he passed it on."

"The strange part to me," commented Cicely, "is that the subject of Mr. Gavin should have cropped up at all between Mr. Voyce and the policeman-friend of his. Why should it have done? Did he explain that?"

"No," said the inventor, wrinkling his forehead in thought, "I cannot remember that he did."

"Which convinces me more than ever that the whole story he told you to-night is merely a malicious invention."

"You persist in defending the character of a man of whom you know nothing?" declared her uncle, with some asperity.

Cicely was tempted to tell him the whole story—how the name of the man they were discussing was not Ronald Gavin at all, but Ian Heath, and that the latter had intimated he was himself connected

with the police. That would have exploded Philip Voyce's treacherous attack.

But, even while the words were trembling on her lips, she remembered that Heath had asked her to keep his real identity secret. In comparison with this, the knowledge that her uncle had practically warned her not to have anything more to do with Ian Heath paled into insignificance.

Warren Murdoch concluded the interview with the following words: "For the reason I have told you, I cannot afford to ignore Philip Voyce's very serious warning about this man Gavin; so I must ask you not to receive him should he call. As for myself, I will give Neale definite instructions on the point."

She was too weary to make any answer.

Before coming to Doone Hall, Cicely had scarcely known what it was to lose her rest, but this night she went to bed with the certainty that she would not be able to sleep. Her mind was a jumble of anger and excitement—with anger predominating. She felt almost contemptuous of her uncle. How could he be such a fool? One glance at the two men should have told him which was the rogue.

What was Voyce's object in endeavouring to poison Murdoch's mind? Had he recognized Ian Heath in Ronald Gavin? If so, he must either have heard of Heath or met him some time previously. And yet Heath, whilst giving her to understand that he did not like the man, had not told her of meeting Voyce before coming to Dartmoor.

Was it merely pique or jealousy on Voyce's part, or was there a more sinister reason?

Heath must be warned. Voyce might be a deadly enemy. Far away from the forces of law and order, anything could happen on the Moor. The savage tak-

ing of life seemed in accord with Nature on this desolate waste.

Running round in a circle, her mind always came back to three main facts. These were in the order named: Ian Heath, Philip Voyce, and—the Invention. The conviction she had was merely a confirmation of her former idea; that the battle which seemed inevitable would be waged by the first two over the third. And a deadly battle it was bound to be—a fight to the death. Much yet remained to be explained, but this particular reading of the future stood out clearly.

She was angry with her uncle for not having sufficient confidence in her. Why couldn't he have explained exactly what his invention was? "Beyond value . . ." A thing beyond value left in a house like Doone Hall, miles away from civilisation. . . . It was running a tremendous risk.

But now that it had been finished and tested, perhaps her uncle would forestall any further danger by having the thing removed. Then, with his work done, he might be induced to leave this house of shadows. She would speak to him in the morning. Perhaps Professor Sapford could be enlisted on her side.

She liked Sapford. He was not so self-centred as her uncle, and took a broader and more general view of life. For instance, he had discussed at length with her many of the latest London plays, including the drama *Mischief* at the St. John's Theatre, which had so enthralled her on her recent visit.

Sapford, she was certain, would understand her reasoning. At the first opportunity she would try to get him to influence Warren Murdoch. However hard she endeavoured to master her dislike of Doone Hall, the place was gradually sapping her strength of mind.

Somewhat eased, she drifted into the half-world of unconsciousness, and presently fell asleep.

She could not be awake, and yet the civilisation of the scene was so vivid that it was impossible to believe it to be a dream.

She was walking in the grounds. It was pitch-black, and yet she was lightly clad—merely a thin silk wrap over her nightdress. Her feet were only slippered, and she could feel the wet grass chilling her flesh. The pain as she stepped on cruel, jagged stones was very real . . . and yet she went on.

Her objective was definite. She was going to the summer-house where Professor Joshua Sapford was sleeping. Why was she going? Was it to try to persuade him to speak to her uncle about leaving Doone Hall? She only knew that some force greater than herself was urging her on.

When she was twenty yards away, a dark shape brushed past her. She could not tell from whence this had come, but concluded that it must have dropped over the wall from the outside world. She tried to hasten after it, for the shape was also proceeding in the direction of the summer-house, and she wished to get there first. That desire was very urgent and keen —she wished to get to the summer-house first.

But in this she was foiled. The shape went too fast for her to catch it up—and now that she was so near each step dragged. So strong was the impression that she recalled looking down to see what was clogging her feet. It was as though they were covered with weeds that clung and clung. . . .

But presently—she could not tell how long after, but a considerable time—she reached the summer-house. The shape was gone—vanished: Had it disappeared into the sleeping-quarters of that nice Professor Sapford whom she had come to tell something?—she could not remember what.

There was a window in the summer-house, and she

looked through this. She had to make certain the Professor was actually inside and safely a-bed before she would venture to open the door. All this was very clear.

So was what she saw when she looked through the window—ghastly, horribly clear!

The shape was inside. It had a man's form, was clothed from head to foot in black, and had a mask covering the features, so that they were undistinguishable.

It had its fingers twined round the neck of the professor, who was sitting up in bed. . . .

She awoke with a start. She had been dreaming—that dreadful mental picture had been nothing but a nightmare.

It was daylight, and the early morning sun was peeping in through the curtains.

She had barely adjusted her mind when the door burst open. Her uncle rushed to the side of the bed. His eyes were staring, and he had the grey, ashen look of a man mortally ill—or mortally afraid.

"Uncle!" she cried.

"Sapford's dead—murdered!" he choked, and buried his face in his hands.

ON THE BOWLING-GREEN

The scream which had been hovering on Cicely's lips since the moment of waking now found utterance.

"I know!" she said; "I know—I saw it done!"

Warren Murdoch caught her arm.

"What do you mean?" he demanded excitedly; "were you in the grounds again last night?" It was as though he actually suspected her.

Beneath the thin nightdress her breast rose and fell.

"It was in a dream—I saw it all distinctly. There was a man dressed all in black—with a mask over his face. His hands were at Professor Sapford's throat. . . ." Horror prevented her saying more.

"You saw this in a dream?" replied her uncle incredulously.

"Yes. I had just awakened when you came into the room. It was"—she shivered again—"dreadfully real."

Her uncle passed a hand over his forehead and withdrew it wet with perspiration.

"I feel I shall go mad," he said; "poor Sapford. . . . He was my guest. . . . I was responsible for his safety —and now he is lying dead!"

"Uncle!"

"I ought not to have told you so abruptly. But I scarcely know what I am doing." He turned and walked towards the window, hands clasped behind him.

Cicely slipped out of bed and put on the dressing-gown lying across a chair.

"This is terrible, uncle, but we must both try to keep our heads; otherwise the murderer will escape."

Murdoch swung round.

"He has already escaped," he snapped; "you don't think the man who did it remained on the premises?"

She took no notice of the ungracious remark. Her uncle had been sincerely attached to the dead man, and he was almost distraught with grief.

"He cannot be far away," she replied; "the first thing to be done is to tell the police." Now that the first shock of surprise had passed, she was feeling more capable of taking charge of the situation.

Her uncle groaned.

"Do whatever you think is best, my dear. I have been completely bowled over. But the nearest police-station is at Tavistock—and we are not on the telephone."

"I will drive over in the Ford. You know, I suppose, that the body must not be touched before the police arrive?"

"I will tell Neale."

She caught his arm.

"No!—do not tell Neale," she said.

The rejoinder irritated him.

"We shall not do much good by harbouring ridiculous suspicions, Cicely. You surely do not think that Neale would murder a guest of mine in cold blood?"

"When the police take control, I am afraid we shall all be suspected more or less, uncle. We must be prepared for that. A murder has been committed, and they will not spare anyone in endeavouring to secure the guilty person."

Murdoch waved his hands like a man come to the end of his senses.

"It is lamentable," he groaned; "the scandal, the upset, the confusion . . . poor Sapford!" Then he turned to her fiercely. "Nothing must be said about the invention—on no account must that be talked about, the result would be overwhelming; and it can have nothing to do with the crime."

"On the contrary, uncle," she answered, "it is more than possible that Professor Sapford met his death because of your invention." She would have saved him this fresh anxiety, but it was not possible. This was no time for hiding the truth.

The words startled him.

"Why do you say that, Cicely? What grounds have you for such an opinion?"

"I am simply using my common sense," she told him. "What are the facts? You have practically perfected an invention which is of tremendous value. Professor Sapford was in your confidence. He was sleeping

away from the house—in a place where the murderer could easily get at him."

Murdoch shook his head.

"When Neale found the body this morning it was not in the summer-house. It was lying on its back on the bowling-green, a distance of nearly sixty yards away."

"I did not see that in my dream," she said.

"What has your dream to do with the murder?"

"I don't know. . . . But it was so real that I cannot dismiss it as being just a coincidence. We must not waste any more time, however. I will dress and drive to Tavistock."

Whilst she was on the stairs she heard a car approaching, and reached the hall just in time to see Neale admit Philip Voyce. The surprise of seeing him was such that she could not speak.

But the caller was not at a loss.

"Good-morning, Miss Garrett. I hope you will excuse this early visit, but I absent-mindedly pocketed one of your uncle's scientific works when I was here last night, and, thinking that he might want the book, I have taken the first opportunity to return it." He placed the volume on the hall table.

Warren Murdoch came hurrying out of the library. He stared at the two uncomprehendingly for a moment before striding forward and seizing the visitor's hand.

"Voyce!" he exclaimed excitably, "you can't imagine how glad I am to see you, my dear fellow! I am completely prostrate this morning."

"Why?—what has happened?"

Cicely told him.

"Last night—at what time we do not know—uncle's friend, Professor Sapford, of the London University, who was down here on a visit, was murdered in the grounds."

Voyce looked as though he could not understand.

"A man—murdered—here?" he repeated; "I can't believe it."

"It's unfortunately too true," said Warren Murdoch; "I am beside myself with worry. Cicely was just off to inform the police at Tavistock. The house will be a pandemonium, I suppose, for the next week. There will be swarms of reporters. . . ."

Voyce stepped across and placed his hand on the older man's shoulders.

"If I can do anything, Mr. Murdoch, you know I will. To begin with, I suggest I save Miss Garrett the fatigue and the unpleasantness of going into Tavistock."

"You are a good fellow," said the inventor warmly. "If you can spare the time I shall be eternally grateful."

"Reserve your thanks until I have actually done something. You know, I suppose, that the first question the police will ask when I bring them back is whether the body has been touched?"

"So Cicely told me; I will see that poor Sapford ——" Murdoch could not proceed; he turned and walked back into the library. When she herself faced about again, after watching him disappear, Cicely found that Voyce had gone. She waited until the sound of the engine finally died away.

"You must not allow yourself to be too much upset, miss—you must eat some breakfast. I have made the coffee."

Cicely scarcely recognised the voice. When she thanked Janet Neale, the woman flushed as though she had been discovered in a misdemeanour instead of a kindness.

She was unable to eat anything, but managed to swallow a cup of coffee. The hot drink revived her.

Then came a resolution. She would have to see this ordeal through herself. Her uncle was a sorely stricken man: he would leave everything to her—and Philip Voyce.

The prospect was disturbing, but she felt she had to undertake it. She rang the bell.

"My uncle is terribly upset at what has happened, Neale," she told the butler, when he appeared; "that is why I want to save him as much as possible."

"I quite understand, miss." The man looked even more haggard than usual, but his tone was firm and respectful.

"Please tell me exactly how you discovered poor Professor Sapford."

"If you feel able to stand the sight, miss, perhaps you would see—the professor?"

"Yes—perhaps I had better do that."

The atmosphere was clear and the air bracing. It seemed impossible that anything so ghastly as murder could be associated with such a morning—perhaps the most pleasant she had known at Doone Hall. But out there somewhere, lying starkly horrible, with the face upturned to the sky, was a dead man. . . .

As her uncle had said, all that remained mortal of Joshua Sapford was not in the summer-house, which was visited first. Apart from the disordered bedclothes —these had been tossed aside as though Sapford had got out of bed in a hurry—there was no sign of anything unusual. None of the simple furniture was disturbed; and, so far as could be judged, no struggle had taken place within the small amount of space.

"I had arranged to take the professor an early morning cup of tea, miss," explained Neale, after she had had a long look round. "I arrived here about seven o'clock, the professor having told me he was an early riser. Bearing this fact in mind, I was not greatly

surprised to find the door open and the place empty. My first thought was that the unfortunate gentleman was having a walk around the grounds.

"Putting the tray down, I went in search of the professor. It was at the back of the house, miss, that I found him—on the big lawn that has always been called the bowling-green because many years ago it was used for that purpose. He was lying on his back—perhaps, miss, you had better not come . . . it's not a nice sight for a young lady." The butler's voice had sunk almost to a whisper.

"It is thoughtful of you to study my feelings, Neale, but I regard it as my duty. This crime has been committed in my uncle's house, and I have resolved to bring the murderer to justice." Her voice rang firm with determination.

"As you will, miss—only I had to warn you." Neale led the way through overgrown, deserted paths until he reached a small wicket-gate at the back of the vegetable-garden. This he held open for her to pass through.

Stretching before her was a large, badly tended patch of turf. This, as the butler had explained, had been used in years gone by as a bowling-green, one of the Coxonfields having been an expert player of this old English game. Now it was nothing but a waste of grass.

Neale hesitated momentarily before pointing to a spot some ten yards away from the path where they both stood.

"It's there, miss," he said.

Cicely braced herself. She had seen the dead bodies of her father and mother, but both had died peacefully, and the expression on their faces had been tranquil at the last. But this—this was entirely different: a man had been brutally murdered. She shuddered as

she walked ahead, but even imagination had not sufficiently prepared her.

Professor Joshua Sapford was lying on his back. His legs were drawn up and his arms out-flung as though to ward off some terrible foe.

Yet it was neither of these facts, dreadful and significant as they were, which caused Cicely to start back, a choking sensation at her heart.

Upon the dead man's face was frozen a look of inconceivable dread. She could never have imagined that the human countenance could have contained such terror. Whoever or whatever had attacked Sapford had assumed such a shape that the victim must have recoiled in mental agony before it.

Yet even this was not the final horror. The head of the dead man was thrown back, leaving the throat exposed—and in the white flesh was a hideous tear, the sight of which made her reel.

"Let me take you back to the house, miss." A hand was supporting her, and she felt grateful, for without it she must have sunk to the ground beside the ghastly exhibit which was shortly to claim the attention of the police.

"Yes, Neale—I cannot stand any more."

It was only after she reached the house that the reflection came that perhaps the hand which had sustained her might belong to the murderer.

ENTER HEATH—

THE grim business of the Law had started. When Voyce returned from Tavistock he brought with him in his serviceable Morris-Cowley an inspector and a constable of the Devon Police, whilst in a rakish two-seater was the medical man who acted as police surgeon.

Warren Murdoch groaned despairingly as the two cars pulled up before the front door.

"You go to your laboratory, uncle," Cicely advised him; "of course, they will want to see you, but that will only be a formal matter. I will answer all their preliminary inquiries."

"Are you sure it won't upset you too much, my dear?" The inventor was plainly eager to be off.

"No—I feel quite calm now. Seeing the body was a shock, but I've got over it."

"Poor Sapford!" muttered Murdoch, before turning tail and rushing away.

Inspector Dann of the Tavistock Police was red-faced and inclined to stoutness as well as self-importance. Like most of his kind, he was blissfully ignorant of his own limitations, and was determined, now that something really worth while had happened in his area of jurisdiction, to utilise it to the fullest possible advantage of the Law generally, but more particularly of Inspector Wilfred Dann.

"Where is the body?" he said at once to Neale, who met the small group on the doorstep.

"It's in the grounds, inspector."

"And who is this?" was the brusque query.

Cicely would have liked to box the speaker's ears. But she answered quietly enough: "I am Miss Garrett, Mr. Warren Murdoch's niece. I keep house for him."

"Where is Mr. Murdoch?"

"He is in his laboratory at present, but he is ready to see you."

"H'm. Well, we'll have a look at the body first, don't you think so, doctor?"

The police surgeon nodded.

"Decidedly. I have a great deal to do to-day."

"If you will come this way—" started Neale.

There was a cold formality about the business which

Cicely found nauseating. And, although she had no great opinion of these men's ability, she felt that the eyes of the inspector had already been fixed suspiciously upon her.

The procession formed itself in the following order: In front walked the inspector by the side of Neale, of whom he was asking a number of questions. Behind this pair came the police surgeon, looking bored and bad-tempered (his work as medico-jurist brought him little remuneration but a considerable amount of hard work), whilst the tail was made up of Cicely and Philip Voyce. The latter spoke to her only once—a fact for which she was grateful.

"You and your uncle must not be too upset, Miss Garrett."

She nodded in acknowledgment of the remark, but did not reply.

A gasp from the inspector and a grunt from the police surgeon marked the arrival at the spot. The discontented lethargy of the medical man disappeared; he walked forward and dropped to his knees to examine the corpse.

Inspector Dann waited impatiently for the doctor to regain his feet. Then, unable to control his restlessness, he started off towards the summer-house, taking Neale with him.

He returned in time to receive the police surgeon's report.

"The man has been brutally done to death," said the doctor. "He has been dead for some hours I should say. There will have to be an autopsy and an inquest. This is murder. I never saw a worse crime."

The words, uttered over the dead body, seemed like the fulfilment of a curse. They caused Cicely to shudder.

"That hole in the throat," asked the inspector, in

a voice that was not entirely under control, "was that the cause of death?"

"Most probably. But I do not care to give any definite opinion until after the autopsy."

"We'll get back to the house," declared the inspector; "there's a whole lot of questions I want answered."

When Neale had closed the library door behind Philip Voyce, who was the last to enter the room, the inspector gave his first direct order.

"Jones," he instructed the awkward-looking constable who had accompanied him from Tavistock, "see that no one leaves the house without my permission."

"Do you mean that my uncle and I are to regard ourselves as prisoners?" demanded Cicely instantly. She ought to have slipped away before, she decided; five miles distant was a man whose help would prove invaluable in this time of crisis.

"I mean that no one must leave this house without my permission," repeated the inspector. "A terrible crime has been committed and it's my duty to discover who did it."

"The inspector will not be too arbitrary, Miss Garrett, I am sure," said Philip Voyce; "he merely wishes to take the usual precautions that the Law demands."

"Tell your master I wish to see him," said the inspector to Neale. He disregarded, as beneath his official dignity, the protest made by the girl.

Warren Murdoch blinked as he came into the room. Looking bewilderedly at the police-inspector, he said: "I hope this will not cause too much notoriety."

Dann frowned.

"If you have a murder committed on your premises, you must expect a certain amount of trouble," he replied portentously. "Now I will commence with your

story, Mr. Murdoch. What do you know of the deceased?"

The inventor explained that Sapford was a very old friend of his; that the London University professor had come recently on a visit to him, and that, acting on medical advice, his guest had been in the habit of sleeping out of doors.

"Curious notion," commented the inspector; "do you know if Professor Sapford had any enemies?"

"It is inconceivable to me that a man of my friend's lovable nature could have an enemy in the world."

"Answer my question, please," reiterated the inspector; "were you aware that the dead man had any enemies?"

"To my knowledge he had no enemies," replied the inventor, flushing at the rudeness in the questioner's tone.

"Can you then give any reason why he should have met his death in this manner?"

"I cannot. Unless——"

The inspector seized on the pause.

"Unless—what?" he demanded harshly. "I must remind you, Mr. Murdoch, that a police inquiry into a murder is a very serious affair."

"You need not remind me about anything so obvious, inspector," was the answer. "I was merely about to make a suggestion which to my own mind is very stupid."

"Never mind what your view is—please continue what you were going to say."

Murdoch flushed again before he said: "If you have been in the neighbourhood long, you no doubt have heard about the superstition which is associated with this house."

"Mr. Murdoch refers to Doone Hall being haunted," interposed Philip Voyce; "I agree that the idea is

an impossible one, but the tradition apparently persists."

Inspector Dann looked as though his always prominent eyes would leap from their sockets.

"No ghost can tear a man's throat like that," he declared. "No, I haven't heard of any superstition. This district seems full of daft sayings and doings." He glared at the lanky P. C. Jones as though he were personally responsible. "I'm from Cornwall," he added with an air of superiority. "What is this bogey-story?"

"As a scientific man I utterly discredit the tradition, but Doone Hall is supposed to be haunted by a vampire," said Warren Murdoch.

"A vampire? What's a vampire?"

The police surgeon, who had been listening with signs of increasing impatience to this cross-examination, smiled sarcastically.

"The police aren't supposed to understand anything outside of the strictly normal, I realise, Dann," he remarked; "but surely you should know what a vampire is?"

"Well—I don't!" Inspector Dann's face had assumed a purplish hue.

"A vampire, then, my dear inspector, is a ghost usually of a criminal, that leaves its grave at night for the purpose of sucking the blood of sleeping persons. It usually attacks the throat of its victim."

The inspector looked as though he might explode.

"You aren't trying to make game of me by any chance, doctor?" he roared. "You and your ghosts! Do you mean to tell me that a ghost could make a hole in a man's throat like that?"

The police surgeon shrugged non-committally.

"I have seen many things in my experience which cannot be logically explained. I merely gave you just

now an item of information. And now, if you will excuse me, I must be going. You will make the necessary arrangements for the post-mortem, which shall be conducted this afternoon."

Nodding to the rest of the company, the speaker walked out.

But for the presence of the police-constable at the door, Cicely would have followed the doctor. She had supped too freely of horrors lately to be able to remain unmoved in that atmosphere of dread. She felt keenly for her uncle, to whom this ordeal of being asked badgering questions was a most painful experience; she was uncomfortable in the presence of Philip Voyce; she strongly disliked this red-faced, bull-necked, ordinary-minded police-inspector—but her chief reason for wishing to escape from the room was to be able to run to the garage, get into the old Ford, and drive the five miles which separated her from Four Ways Cottage. If only she could see Ian Heath, she felt that half of her troubles would be over.

The police-inspector had restarted his questioning of her uncle.

"How did you come to hear of the murder?" she heard him ask.

Then a sound that caused everything in the room to be momentarily blotted from her mind came from the outside world. It was the sound of a spluttering motor-cycle engine.

She looked round. The constable had slightly changed his position. Without heed to the consequences, she rushed to the door, quickly turned the handle and was out into the hall before the policeman had recovered from his surprise.

From the hall she ran into the drive—where, astride a disreputable motor-cycle, was the very man of whom she had been thinking!

It was no time for the conventions, and she disregarded them.

"I want you," she said simply, when he had reached her side. "Professor Sapford, a great friend of my uncle, was murdered here last night——"

The eyes regarding her become steely bright.

"So soon," muttered Ian Heath beneath his breath, and then: "Please tell me quickly all you know. I was away yesterday, but I came over first thing this morning. Thanks for your note. Now tell me."

When she had done so, his hand rested for a moment on her arm. "I am glad I am here," he said. "I will do everything that is possible—you must leave it to me."

"I knew I could rely on you." They were simple words, but they represented the easing of a great burden. Although the pall of death hung about them, she felt tremendously relieved. The suffocating sense of tension had gone. This man's presence had banished it.

Then the shadows came again. She suddenly remembered.

"But you must go! They think you are a criminal! Suspicion will fall on you!" She spoke in quick, nervous sentences, her face close to his.

Ian Heath smiled.

"And who are 'they,' please?"

"Philip Voyce has been poisoning the mind of my uncle."

He still smiled reassuringly at her.

"Which makes him rather more stupid than I had imagined," was his reply. "You needn't be afraid for me, Miss Garrett. I rather fancy I can look after myself in this matter."

With his hand lightly pressed against her arm, he started to walk towards the house.

"But the police—they are already here!" Yet even this second warning was ignored.

"That's quite interesting," was all he said—and the apparition of P. C. William Jones, his mouth agape and his long limbs moving disjointedly, was regarded merely with a look of amusement.

P. C. William Jones was animated by a vast concern. Spurred to a belated sense of duty by the recent stinging reproaches of his superior, he now extended a large hand, exclaiming: "'Ere, you! The inspector wants yer!"

Ian Heath knocked aside the blue-clothed arm.

"Even if you are addressing me, constable, you show lamentable want of respect," he commented. Brushing past the policeman, and turning sideways to his companion, he said in a lower tone: "Don't let anything worry you."

But Cicely was worried, and worried very considerably. As Heath opened the library door, and stepped into the room by her side, there was a moment's significant silence.

This was broken by the voice of the man she so disliked, saying: "Here is the very person I have been telling you about, inspector."

—WHO SHOWS HIS BRACES

THE scene had certain elements of drama. Facing the door was Philip Voyce, his attitude challenging. On the opposite side of the library table were Inspector Dann and Warren Murdoch. All three stared curiously at Heath as he sauntered past the bewildered-looking P. C. Jones into the room.

"Talking about me, anyone?" he drawled. His glance at Voyce carried amusement.

Inspector Dann broke in.

"Is your name Gavin?" he barked.

"Ronald Gavin. Why, don't you like it?"

"I would warn you, young man, not to fool with me," came the explosive retort. "What are you doing here?"

"Miss Garrett is a friend of mine—I came to call on her."

"Indeed. Very interesting," was the sneered rejoinder. "Well, Mr. Ronald Gavin, let me inform you that a murder has been committed in this house, or, rather, in the grounds outside——"

"In the case of murder I should say it would be advisable to be strictly accurate," coolly remarked the other.

"I tell you a murder has been committed in the grounds of this house, and that every person who has been known to visit Doone Hall or to have any association with the house is more or less under suspicion."

Heath moved a step forward.

"Do you wish me to turn out my pockets on the chance of my having the lethal weapon concealed?" he asked.

The inspector fumed.

"I have already warned you that this is a serious matter. Certain information has been passed to me which makes it imperative that you should give a full account of your movements last night, Mr. Gavin."

"Well, now, let me see. I went for a walk after tea. Arriving back at Four Ways Cottage, where I am staying with my friend, Mr. Gerald Hartsgill—by the way, inspector, I don't mind so much for myself, but I hope you won't worry Mr. Hartsgill with any questions; he's a frightfully nervy type and the stress might cause him to forget to feed his fowls——"

"Pssh!" ejaculated an angry voice, "the man is trying to make a fool of you, inspector!"

Ian Heath turned a guileless eye upon Philip Voyce, the speaker, before Inspector Dann broke into a fresh fit of rage.

"Trying to make a fool of me, is he? I'll guarantee to wipe that smile off his face pretty soon." He motioned to the constable who, moving lumberingly forward, took up a position by Heath's right shoulder.

"Now, then, answer these questions or I'll put you under arrest straightaway."

Cicely spoke for the first time since she returned to the room.

"Uncle, this is unbearable! Why don't you say something? Of what do you accuse Mr."—she paused perceptibly and hated herself for the slip—"Gavin?"

The police-inspector frowned.

"I'm not making any direct charge yet awhile," he replied; "but, unless this friend of yours, whom you seem so anxious to protect, can give me a satisfactory account of his last night's doings, I shall arrest him on suspicion. Now, sir!" he added, turning to Heath.

"But, my dear chap, I was halfway through the story when this gentleman"—he paused to smile guilelessly at Voyce—"interrupted me."

The smile appeared to infuriate Voyce.

"Ask him what he was doing in the grounds of this house at two o'clock in the morning three nights ago?" he said sharply.

"Really, Mr. Boyce—your name *is* Boyce, isn't it?—I thought that I had explained fully to Mr. Murdoch about that. Yes, it's quite true, inspector, that I was in the grounds of this house three nights ago—by the way, how funny that remark of Mr. Boyce's just now sounded: 'At two o'clock in the morning three nights ago.' "

As she saw the rage-distorted face of Philip Voyce, the baffled expression on the mottled countenance of the police-inspector, and the utter bewilderment evidenced by that simple bucolic, P. C. Jones, Cicely felt her anxiety becoming rapidly less. Why Ian Heath should choose to play the buffoon in this way she could not guess, but her estimate of the man was sufficient assurance that he had a very good reason. Meanwhile, his asinine conduct was so well assumed that she found it amusing—especially as the rage of Voyce increased palpably every minute.

"What were you doing in the grounds? And cut out the funny stuff. It strikes me you're not such a fool as you try to make out."

Heath looked blank.

"You wouldn't suggest that I was trying to deceive you, inspector?" he asked; "I trust I have more sense than that. But to come to the—er—morning three nights ago. You see, I'm a stranger to Dartmoor—merely came down from Cheltenham, where I run a coal business——"

The inspector made a note in his book with his stubby pencil.

"A coal-merchant from Cheltenham, eh? That's interesting," he commented with heavy, menacing pleasantry.

"I'm so glad. It must be rather jolly you finding so many things which are interesting. Do you mind if I go on now?"

"Yes, I want to hear the rest," replied Dann in the same tone as before.

"Well, as I was saying, I'm a stranger to Dartmoor. I've never been here before, and it was only after very deep thought that I accepted the very kind invitation of my friend Hartsgill to come down to spend a few days with him at his cottage. Sleeplessness is my par-

ticular complaint. I should think I have been to every doctor in Cheltenham—I hope you get your rest at nights, inspector?—and one of the things I intended to do when I got to Dartmoor was to take plenty of good, long, night walks. On this particular night I got lost —but"—breaking off—"this gentleman knows the rest. I've been talking so much that I must confess my throat is dry."

"What did this man tell you?" demanded the inspector to Warren Murdoch.

The inventor, who during the whole of Ian Heath's strange monologue had looked utterly perplexed, now roused himself from a state of abstraction.

"But for the information given me by my friend, Mr. Voyce, I should have been very grateful to Mr. Gavin. The story he told me was that whilst wandering about outside the grounds, he saw a man climb the outside wall. Thinking he was a burglar, he followed him. He and the man had a fierce tussle and the burglar made off. There was no doubt Mr. Gavin was completely exhausted when found by my niece, whose attention had been attracted. As I say, but for Mr. Voyce's news, I should have been very pleased to have renewed Mr. Gavin's acquaintance. Even now, I cannot credit that he had anything to do with the death of my poor old friend, Sapford."

"I can assure you, my dear sir, on my word of honour as a coal-merchant and a well-known Past-Master in the Ancient Order of Buffaloes, that I did not."

Inspector Dann waved the denial aside.

"I am not at all satisfied with you, Mr. Gavin," he said, closing his notebook; "and, consequently, I am going to act upon my original intention and take you into custody until such time as inquiries can be made about you."

"It is monstrous!" declared Cicely.

"It is rather more than monstrous," said the threatened man; "here I've been called back to Cheltenham this morning on account of unexpected pressure of business, and now you want to keep me in some wretched police cell. Perhaps you'd like to read this telegram for yourself, inspector?" he asked. Without waiting for the other's reply, he walked round the table. With his back to everyone else in the room, he drew his coat aside.

Inspector Dann, who had opened his mouth to bark out a remonstrance, allowed the words to die unuttered. He stared like one completely stupefied whilst the man facing him babbled the most idiotic nonsense.

"I don't suppose you're interested in braces, inspector, but I felt bound to show you these . . . I bought them in Cheltenham just before I came away . . . do you like the pattern? . . . just notice that mauve line . . . rather neat, don't you think?"

The only reply Inspector Dann made to this unintelligible drivel was to slump down heavily into the nearest chair, thereby giving a very fair imitation of a man hit suddenly, unexpectedly, and violently over the head with a coal-hammer. When he finally spoke, strange words issued from his twitching lips.

"Clear the room, Jones," he ordered: "I want to speak to this gentleman alone."

It was the new, or rather the old, Ian Heath who was speaking now. He was walking in the grounds of Doone Hall with the girl he had so mystified half an hour before.

"It was shockingly bad taste of me to play the fool," he admitted, "but I did it deliberately in order to lead that man Voyce on. I was pretty certain where I stood

with him before, but now I am positive. He is the nigger in the wood-pile, Miss Garrett."

"I hate him myself. Sometimes he makes me feel even afraid, but do you think——?"

He seemed too absorbed in his own thoughts to reply to the unfinished question.

"I must disappear," he remarked.

She could not follow his meaning.

"But——"

"Oh, I shall come back!" he said reassuringly; "some filthy work has been done already and more is likely in the future. I want to be on hand—there are so many questions that require answering. I wouldn't miss the finish for anything."

He glanced carefully around before he went on speaking.

THE WOMAN WITH THE MONOCLE

In France they called this woman "The Dark Shadow"; in England, where counter-espionage agents had even better cause to hate her, she was known as "The Demon": neither nickname belied her. During the war she had been a novitiate; now she was a past mistress; perhaps the most dangerous woman in Europe.

Gusta Straube looked upon the viciousness which frothed and seethed about her with a cold and calculating stare. High-born as he was, bred in luxury, refinement, and culture, yet no form of vice was a stranger to her mind. The weaknesses of the flesh were her special weapons.

She sat in an underground cabaret a mere stone's throw from Piccadilly Circus. The room was huge, but the low ceiling and the many pungent odours which

fought against each other for mastery caused a sense of breathlessness. So dense was the tobacco smoke that the room was wreathed in the clouds.

At one end of this devil's cauldron was a raised platform. On this a small negro jazz orchestra piped the habitués on their way to Hell. This cabaret, known as the One O'Clock, was in the heart of London's ill-famed Black Quarter. A plague spot.

The den was crowded. Those who met here were evil—they carried the marks in their faces—whilst their actions were of the Beast. The men as well as the women were painted. . . . A morbidly fascinating study, these faces. They comprised many of the types so well known to criminologists and alienists. There were faces saturnine and faces expressionless (many of the latter shuddersome), faces hawk-like, others that appeared incredibly stupid until it was noticed that when these thin-lipped men spoke they did so only with the corners of their mouths. . . .

And the woman! These had faces which an opium-crazed artist might have painted. Here all the passions were uncontrolled: they were mixing with their own kind: stimulated by cocaine and other drugs, the lid was off, the veil was torn aside. The only persons amongst that terrible crowd who showed any control were the proprietor, a man with the features of a saint, but the eyes of a satyr, and the woman seated at the table in the corner which commanded a view of the door. But both these were master-minds; they used the others as pawns. They created the atmosphere in which these creatures danced, but they did not join in the revels. They merely watched.

The man with the saint's face approached the woman, who had made him a sign. Formerly, as he had stood regarding the scene, a shadowy, mirthless

smile had played about his lips, but now he was alert, serious, all attention.

"Yes?" he asked.

Gusta Straube fixed a monocle in her left eye and looked hard at him.

"You told Kroon I should be here?"

"I not only told him but said that you wished urgently to see him. He should have come."

The woman replied in a chilling voice: "He has just arrived. It is as well." Sylvester Lade moved away. He feared scarcely any man, but he was mortally afraid of this woman.

He who approached through the turgid ranks of the dancers was tall, slim, personable, well dressed. His face was distinguished, and would have been good-looking but for two things. The first was a sabre-cut that scarred his right cheek and the other was the unmistakable impress which his life and trade had left upon his features.

He quickened his pace when he saw the woman with the monocle. Gusta Straube was his task-mistress, his employer, and the person who could ruin him by a few words written on a piece of paper and delivered at a certain address in Antwerp.

Now he stood before her, while eyes peered.

"You are late." This woman, who owned the bodies and souls of those who worked for her, made the words a harsh rebuke.

"I am sorry—it was unavoidable. Even now I'm here at the greatest risk."

A smile appeared on the heavy face. It stung Victor Von Kroon. He had sunk low, but not so low that he could watch unmoved a woman regarding him with open contempt.

"Sit down."

The order was rasped, but he obeyed it unquestioningly. Gusta Straube was one accustomed to being obeyed. And the eyes of those around continued to peer, for it was known that this meeting between the German woman and one of her principal agents was important.

Von Kroon, once an Austrian aristocrat, now a tool for Berlin, lowered himself into a chair. In former days he would have been on an equality with Gusta Straube, but now he had to listen like an inferior.

Gusta Straube was a good type of the Teutonic feminine. Indeed, so pronounced were her physical characteristics that it was remarkable how deft could be her disguises.

With the monocle screwed into her left eye, she looked forbidding and sinister: the glass could not hide the basilisk quality of her stare.

She was a heavy-weight among women. In spite of tremendous calves, her dress followed the prevailing fashion by barely reaching the knee. Her hair was cut close to the neck in a boyish crop. Her corsage was daringly low, and upon the fat neck and swelling shoulders were many jewels.

Her face was heavy. The flesh, creamy in tint, had a dull, lifeless appearance. One might have expected the eyes of such a woman to be glazed, but instead, they were reptilian. Through the glass of the monocle, the left one appeared to have a stupefying effect upon all who looked her way.

Altogether a woman from whom both men and women (but especially the latter) drew hastily and instinctively away: she might have been a priestess of some unnameable cult as she sat facing the visitor upon whose forehead was a thin coating of perspiration.

"I understand you bungled things the other night—

the girl should have been with us by now," she said harshly.

Von Kroon shifted in his chair.

"I was too anxious," he admitted; "I thought it would be safe enough to push a hypodermic into her arm as she was leaving the theatre, but a man I hadn't reckoned with turned up. A crowd collected—the chance was gone."

"Who was the man?"

"Ian Heath—I expect you have heard of him." He spoke sardonically.

Into the eyes of the woman came a cold glitter.

"One of the reasons why I have come to London is to take Mr. Ian Heath back to Berlin," she said; "there's a man there who will be particularly pleased to see him . . . Heath has given us far too much trouble."

Von Kroon permitted himself the indulgence of a smile.

"He won't give any more," he replied; "he's dead."

"Dead?" The monocle slipped from the speaker's eye.

"Stone dead! An hour or two after he had interrupted my affair with the girl, I pumped sufficient poison gas into his bedroom to have killed an ox. The evening papers that night published the news of Heath's death. . . . Well?" the speaker demanded after a pause.

"I was just thinking what a fool you are!" was the shattering reply. "Do you consider for a moment that a man like Ian Heath is killed so easily? He has crossed my path too many times for me to believe it."

"But there was a funeral—I saw a coffin come out of the house."

The woman laughed harshly.

"With Heath himself, no doubt, disguised as the undertaker!" she commented. "You can rest assured that he is not dead. The announcement in the evening papers was merely a ruse to put us off the scent."

"But why should Heath be mixed up in this business?" demanded the bewildered man. "He has been in Venice—he could have known nothing about it."

The reply came instantly.

"Isn't Heath always mixed up in every important affair?"

To this Von Kroon had no answer. He sat brooding darkly over the whisky and soda which he had ordered.

"You can take it for certain that Heath is now in Devonshire," said Gusta Straube, after another pause.

"Then you must inform——"

The woman turned her monocled eye upon him.

"No names," she ordered. "Now listen, please, for I have a great deal to do to-night, and I cannot stay here much longer. You are to leave for Dartmoor immediately. When you get there you will place yourself under the orders of the man you know. Apart altogether from the main business, Heath must be looked after. I should much prefer him being taken prisoner and held until I arrive myself. It will be easy for me to arrange his transference to Berlin, but if S—— decides that he must be got rid of immediately, kill him like a dog. After all, there need be no scruples about killing a man who has already declared himself to be dead!"

"And the girl?" inquired the other.

"I leave the girl to S——. He will look after her until I arrive."

There was no uttered threat, but Von Kroon, looking at the speaker, muttered: "Let this one go, Gusta. What a fiend you are!"

The woman, who was a countess in her own right, turned on him an uncomprehending stare.

Von Kroon rose. This order which Gusta Straube had given him must be obeyed. He didn't particularly care for the fellow S——, who was one-third a genius, one-third a mountebank, and one-third a devil, but, if the woman's surmise was correct, he would be interested to run across Ian Heath again. There would be no captivity for the hated British Secret Service agent: he wouldn't wait for that; there would be a bullet aimed at his heart.

And there was also the girl. She was pretty, he remembered. Rather than let her fall into the power of that she-devil, Gusta Straube, he would look after her himself.

"Don't bungle things this time!" was the monocled woman's parting injunction.

A few moments after Von Kroon had gone, a figure sitting on the opposite side of the room slipped out.

A QUICK-CHANGE ARTIST

MEANWHILE, down at Doone Hall, a gardener had been engaged.

A week after the tragedy of Professor Joshua Sapford's death, a shuffling figure toiled laboriously up the neglected carriage-drive and presented himself at the entrance. He wore corduroy trousers of remarkable shapelessness below a sleeved waistcoat. Upon his head was a felt hat of pre-war vintage. George Amos—for such he said was his name—was bearded and wrinkled, and he seemed to carry about with him a considerable portion of the earth which was his native province. From his appearance he might have been the

grandfather of all gardeners, and Neale, when he opened the door to him at ten o'clock on this particular morning, viewed the caller with suspicion. But for the fact that Miss Cicely had warned him beforehand of this old man's promised appearance, the butler would have sent the fellow packing instantly.

As it was, obeying the specific orders he had received from his mistress, Neale, with evident misgiving, asked the caller to enter.

A quarter of an hour later he was informed by Miss Cicely that the mouldy visitor had been engaged as gardener on a month's trial. He would sleep in the summer-house in the absence of a cottage, and would see to his own meals, as an oil-stove would be installed in his quarters.

"It is time someone was engaged to look after the grounds, Neale," his mistress continued; "I have no doubt that Amos—who comes with most excellent references—will soon work wonders. The place is a wilderness at present."

"Very good, miss," said the butler. Convention demanded as much, but the remark was made without conviction. It appeared to him as being somewhat peculiar that a gardener—and an old man at that—should be engaged at this particular moment. What was even more puzzling was the strong sense of excitement under which his mistress appeared to be labouring. Miss Cicely was evidently making a big effort to control this without, however, succeeding. But he was merely a paid servant of the family, and it was not his duty to question the actions of his employers.

When he informed his wife of the news a few minutes later, he received a shock, however.

"That man may not be a gardener at all," Janet said breathlessly. "James, do you know what I think? He has been brought here to spy on us!"

The butler stared at her.

"I had not thought of that," he said wretchedly. "Suppose he should see——?"

His wife raised her hand, and he stopped.

Working steadily among the weeds, the newly appointed gardener reflected on the singular changes which befell some men. Take himself, for instance: Not many days before he had been a Secret Service agent back in London after a particularly trying experience. Then he had transformed himself into an advertised corpse. Following quickly upon this change he had been a coal-merchant with a prosperous business at Cheltenham, but an unfortunate predisposition to insomnia. Whilst fulfilling this rôle he had become a suspected criminal—if he hadn't shown that fool of an inspector his Secret Service badge pinned on his braces, the position might momentarily have been very awkward—and now he was a gardener, complete with beard, wrinkles, and a nominal qualification for the old-age pension. Heigho!

Cicely—Heath had become accustomed to thinking of her solely as "Cicely"—had been wonderful. She had not only agreed to his scheme—although his disappearance from the scene of action had meant such a grave risk that he started to shiver whenever he thought about it—but had made it possible for him to return in this unexpected character. Whatever opposition she may have met from her uncle had been overcome. He was safe from interference in that quarter.

Much had happened during his absence. At the inquest the local jury had returned a verdict to the effect that Joshua Sapford had "met his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown." The foreman, in delivering this dictum, had been in a state of

collapse. His mental condition had been obvious—his mind and the minds of his colleagues had rejected all physical explanations, and had concentrated on the uncanny mystery of the tragic occurrence: the wound in the dead man's throat had been conclusive evidence for these superstitious countrymen that the victim had met his end through the foul creature that haunted Doone Hall.

Following the verdict, the body had been removed to London, buried—and the world thought of other things. The eeriest mystery is soon crowded out of the newspaper columns: the Special Correspondents sent down by the big London dailies had run riot for a week, but then, "The Dartmoor Vampire Mystery," as it was called, had been forced to give way before the newer attractions of the murder of a British General by his wife and the sensational suicide of a famous financier, whose affairs were shown to be in a lamentable state.

For the outside world, the event which had focussed national attention upon Doone Hall lost its interest—isn't something fresh in the sensational line always happening?—and the gloomy house on Dartmoor was left once again in peace.

But the new gardener, hacking with an unaccustomed hand at the tough weeds, knew that, so far from the drama of Doone Hall being finished, it had scarcely begun: the murder of that innocent professor was merely the prologue.

ONE LINK IN THE CHAIN

SOMETHING was stirring outside. Heath, always a light sleeper, was running no unnecessary risk. When he had taken on this new job he did so with a full realization

of the danger entailed. In the daytime he might count himself as being reasonably safe, but at night he was like a rabbit squatting permanently on the skyline waiting for the poachers to take a pot-shot. That summer-house was about as good a fortress as a cheese-box.

Philip Voyce had called that afternoon—according to Cicely, he was more than ever in the good books of her uncle—and in leaving the house had made a detour of the grounds. Without giving the impression that he wished to avoid the man—this, he felt, would have caused instant suspicion—Heath had to continue his work.

It was an uncomfortable feeling, having his man whose mind he sensed was full of some devilry standing quite close to him whilst he went on with his job of turning over the earth. Heath had learned to do many jobs, but gardening was not one of them. The spade he was using felt as awkward a tool as was ever fashioned for man's discomfiture.

And all the time, although he did not look up after the first respectful greeting, when he said "Good-arternoon, zur," and touched his forelock like a true son of the soil, he was conscious that Voyce's eyes were drilling into him, and that the man had a cryptic smile upon his thin lips. . . .

Yet the only remark the watcher made was commonplace enough: "You seem to be making good progress, gardener."

Had Voyce penetrated his disguise? If he had, he would act without hesitation. Voyce was playing for a very big stake—nothing less than the theft of Warren Murdoch's invention when it was perfected—and he was not likely to let the killing of a man he suspected stand in his way, especially as he had such an invaluable alibi as the Doone Hall vampire available.

Again he heard the noise.

Heath had got into the habit of slipping into the campbed only partly undressed, and as he stood upright he had merely to slide his feet into the rubber-soled shoes he kept handy for just such an emergency as this.

Opening the door a few inches, he waited, a revolver in his right hand. If Mr. Murderer was coming his way he would guarantee him a good reception.

From a distance of a few yards he heard somebody or something stepping through the bushes. Pitch-dark, with no moon, it was impossible to see far. But his trained sense of hearing was reliable enough: he determined to investigate.

He moved forward cautiously. His original impression had changed. When first he heard the sound he imagined that the intruder was approaching the summer-house; now he realised that the man was going in the direction of the Hall.

For what purpose?

He himself made no noise—he stepped cautiously, and the rubber soles prevented slipping—but he had not gone more than a dozen yards before the still air was rent by the sound of a snapped stick: a rotten piece of wood must have broken beneath the man's tread.

Eager for the "kill," Heath pressed on. The prospect of getting his fingers round Philip Voyce's throat was peculiarly alluring; the anticipation filled him with a potent joy like the drinking of some heady wine.

Everything was still in deepest shadow. It was almost like playing a game of blind man's buff. But, crawling now on hands and knees, Heath saw ahead of him a crouching figure. Gaining another two yards, he flung himself forward.

He landed deftly and cleanly on the man's back,

which was surprisingly broad, and groped with eager fingers for the throat. He had barely touched coarse, unshaven flesh when the man reared himself like a wounded bear and crashed sideways with the obvious intention of falling on his attacker as they both went to earth.

The movement was executed with such celerity that Heath was taken partly by surprise. The fellow was astonishingly heavy—the breath had been nearly knocked out of him by the partial impact.

The man gave him no further time for reflection; righting himself, he was on the top of him, fighting like a wild beast. Tooth and claw it was, and if Heath had not possessed a more than useful knowledge of jujitsu (the finest asset in a rough-house there is), he would scarcely have had time to adjust himself. As it was, he got one arm around the fellow's neck; there was a slow, horrible, muffled groan—and Heath rose, breathing rather heavily.

"Now for a little talk," he murmured, flashing the small electric-torch he carried by means of the belt around his waist.

He was not surprised to discover that the vanquished man was not Voyce—this fellow had been broader and heavier. But he was certainly disappointed. His luck was dead out: at such an hour and in such a place, what better opportunity could he have had for a quiet, persuasive talk with the man he suspected? He rather fancied he could have induced Voyce to have betrayed something of his hopes, if not his plans. It would have been very interesting. . . .

But this uncouth-looking fellow with the mud-soiled clothes and the fortnight's beard on his face—who could he be? The lips were apart, showing broken teeth.

It was this sight which brought remembrance.

Heath recalled a similar struggle he had had in the grounds of Doone Hall not so very many nights before. That fight had lasted much longer, and he had had, if anything, the worst of it—*but this was the same man!* A second look convinced him there could be no doubt about it.

The man, recovering, opened his eyes. He looked into the barrel of a revolver.

"If you keep quiet, you'll be all right; if you start playing the fool again, you'll get this." Heath patted the weapon with his free hand.

"Who—who are you? Before I say anythin', I wants to know."

The words were gasped in a voice harsh with fear.

"What are you afraid of?" inquired Heath. "The police?"

The man shivered.

"Yes, I am! The swine! They've been huntin' me down—and I never did it! I swear I never did it! D'ye hear that?—I never did it! And me living like a pig. . . ." The speaker choked. His hands went to his face. His shoulders were bowed. The next moment his whole body was racked with sobs.

Heath was moved in spite of himself. This was not acting; the man was sincere. He spoke like one who was damned.

"You have nothing to fear from me, if what you say is true," he remarked reassuringly. "All I want to know is why you are here—this is the second time I've come across you late at night in these grounds. You must explain."

The man dropped his hands.

"If I explained it would go hard with others," he replied; "take me, if you're a 'tec—but after I've swung——"

Heath lowered his revolver.

"Don't talk like a fool," he broke in; "can't you see that I'm willing to believe what you say? If it will give you any satisfaction, I'll tell you I'm not a detective. And if you'll be sensible, I'll promise to help you instead of handing you over to the police. I'm a friend to the people in Doone Hall. That ought to satisfy you."

"You swear that?"

"Oh, I'll swear it, if you like."

"All right. I'll take your word. Now where can we talk? I'm all in—I haven't had anything to eat for over two days. It was to get food that I came here to-night."

Something of the truth was already beginning to dawn on the listener. Heath, pointing with his left hand, said: "There is a summer-house over there. I have some food which you can have. For the last time: no tricks, and I'll play fair. Now walk on.

Five minutes later the hunted man was seated on Heath's bed in the summer-house devouring biscuits and cheese and drinking bottled beer. He gulped the food as though he were starving: this part of his statement must at least be true.

After he had consumed everything in the hut that was eatable, Heath gave him a cigarette. The man puffed at it with the same fierce gluttony he had shown towards the food.

"My name's Gibson—no doubt you've heard of it," he said, emitting a mouthful of smoke.

"I've been out of England for some time," replied Heath.

The man eyed him suspiciously.

"Before I say anything more, I want to know what you are doing in those togs. You talk educated—you ain't a gardener. And you ain't an old man."

"Your story first, Gibson," was the answer; "afterwards I may relieve your anxiety."

"You're not kiddin' me?"

"Certainly not. I suppose you are a relative of Neale, the butler at Doone Hall?"

"How do you know?" The tone was fiercely suspicious again.

"I don't know—yet; I only guessed. Damn it, man, if I'm to try to help you—and I *can* help you—you must begin by trusting me."

"Sorry, guv'nor—but if you had lived *my* life for the past few weeks, you wouldn't be inclined to believe in your own mother. . . . Do you mean to say you haven't read of Gibson, the fellow they want for murder?"

"I saw a headline one day, but, as I have told you, I have been away from England until quite recently."

Gibson gulped like one approaching a distasteful task.

"An old lady was killed in Newcastle," he said tonelessly. "I was seen leaving the house shortly before the body was found. I admit I went there to try to pinch some of the old girl's jewels—but the worst I ever did was burglin'. I was never a killer. But I had a bad record, you understand, and the cops would have been ready to swear anythin' on me once I was jugged. They haven't got me yet, though; I've had 'em all on the run ever since the hue and cry was raised by that cursed servant-girl who swore that she saw me with my hands at the old girl's throat . . . . You do believe me, guv'nor? I swear it's the truth I'm telling."

"Yes, I believe you, Gibson. The police, generally speaking, are very fair, but occasionally they blunder. And, naturally enough, they are pretty keen on getting an arrest. Why did you come to Dartmoor?"

"For two reasons. The first was because the Moor

is a big place in which to hide, and the second was because James Neale is a half-brother of mine. He has been keeping me going in food. Later on, when the shouting dies down a bit, I shall try to clear out from Plymouth, but all the ports are too closely watched at present. Jimmy Neale is a white man; he and his wife have seen me through as best they could, although it meant a great risk to them. The night when I had that first scrap with you, I came here for food—Neale leaves it in a wooden box outside the kitchen door. I only come when I feel it's safe, but to-night I was starving. . . ."

"Gibson," said his listener, "I intend to help you. Now attend carefully to what I am going to say."

The man craned forward to listen.

"THIS IS ENGLAND'S"

WHILST the man she was beginning to feel she loved was solving one of the many puzzles in the complicated tangle of Doone Hall, Cicely herself was undergoing a curious experience.

She had been awakened from a sound sleep by hearing her name called in a cautious voice. When her senses had fully returned, she was surprised to see her uncle bending over the bed.

"My dear," said Warren Murdoch in a low tone, "I want you to be good enough to dress. There is something very important I wish to say to you." His manner was so strange, his face so white and drawn, that she fancied at first he must be ill. When she put the question to him, however, he shook his head.

"I am not ill, but worried. Come to my room when you are dressed," he said, before turning away.

Although the clock on the small table by the side of

the bed showed twenty minutes past two o'clock, she rose at once. What could have happened to make her uncle behave in this way?

When she tapped on Murdoch's door ten minutes later, the inventor said, to her surprise: "We will go to the laboratory."

She followed him with an uneasy mind. It was only after the laboratory door had been locked behind them that Murdoch commenced to explain.

"I want you to listen attentively to what I have to say, Cicely, and please do not interrupt until I have come to an end. Will you agree to that?" She nodded, and he continued: "Lying on the table there"—pointing to an oblong box—" is an invention which I fully believe will revolutionize all future warfare. Indeed, it may play its part in abolishing all future international strife. For that reason its value is practically beyond price—and, Cicely, for the first time since I started working on it, I am afraid . . . *afraid!*"

"Afraid of someone stealing it?" Already she had broken her promise not to interrupt.

"Afraid of the consequences if it should fall into the wrong hands," he replied. "It is that thought which gives me the most terrible fear. I suppose it is the death of my dear old friend, but lately I have been beset by strange misgivings. The feeling often comes that I may die . . . and die suddenly."

"Uncle, you must not talk like that! I cannot stand it! You have always been so well. . . ."

"Two years ago the best man in Wimpole Street warned me. But I have felt so well since I have been working on this"—he pointed to the table—"that I have forgotten. Lately, however—since Sapford's murder—I have had misgivings . . . that Wimpole Street specialist hinted that the end, when it came, might be very sudden. . . ."

Her voice was warm with indignation.

"He had no right to tell you . . . and very likely he is wrong. These specialists often are, uncle . . . I cannot bear it . . ." for, indeed, she was very fond of this man who had brought so much strangeness into her life.

Warren Murdoch touched her shoulder.

"My work is done . . . and the thought of death does not worry me. But to-night as I lay in bed I had a presentiment. It must have been something like your dream, Cicely, the night Sapford was killed. . . ." The speaker's voice broke a little before he went on: "I must have dozed—I was not sound asleep; I am sure of that—but I woke up shivering. I imagined I was lying where Sapford was found—and that the same hand had killed me. . . ."

"Whose?" Her voice sounded shrill, almost hysterical.

"That I cannot tell you, child. But the impression was so vivid that I came at once to your room. Cicely, I want you to fulfill a trust—a trust which I regard as sacred." He looked at her inquiringly, and she answered before he put the request into words.

"I will do anything you wish, uncle."

His face brightened.

"I knew you would; you are my sister's child. It is this: If anything should happen to me, I want you to safeguard my invention."

"Of course, uncle . . . but cannot you take it to a more secure place than Doone Hall?"

"There is a safe enough place here," he answered. "I will show it to you presently. And remember this: my invention, which you must defend with your life if needs be, must be kept for my country—it is for England, and no other Power. You understand that?"

"Yes, uncle—but don't be so depressed."

"I am not depressed; only anxious. Now let me tell you something of the invention so that you may realise how valuable it is." He paused to walk to the table in the centre of the laboratory and place his hand on the oblong box.

"With this, in the event of war, I could drive every enemy aircraft within a certain radius clean out of the sky," he said impressively. "You see how valuable that would be in the protection of the coastline of England; why, it is almost beyond value."

"It should be removed to a place of safety—away from Doone Hall," she commented; "this would seem far too dangerous a place for it to be left here. And if it is intended for the British Government, uncle, why do you not take it to London?"

He smiled at her a little patronisingly.

"I want it to be here—in my house. Whilst it is here it continues to be mine. Once I have handed it over I lose all control of it. No, I have a perfectly safe hiding-place in Doone Hall. As I promised, I will show it to you presently. There it will rest securely. There I can watch over it. But in case anything should happen to me, I want you to know where it is."

"I wish you had left here before, uncle." Something of Murdoch's foreboding had passed to her.

"It is too late to consider that now, my dear; no doubt I was wrong—poor Sapford's death has, indeed, proved I was wrong. But in this place I considered I was perfectly safe; I did not imagine that unknown enemies—men who would not scruple to strike in the dark and without warning—would discover my secret. But, come—I will show you where I intend to deposit my machine and all the papers dealing with it."

A journey was made to the top of the house. On reaching the attic-landing the inventor paused.

"This secret hiding-place I read about in a history of the Coxonfield family," he explained. "Immediately I decided to utilize it I burned the book. Now watch." He walked across to the last board but one of the landing floor, and, using a penknife as leverage, raised it so that it rested on hinges which were attached at intervals along one side.

Passing his hand beneath the next board, Murdoch struggled to release what to Cicely appeared a rusty bolt in the wall.

"Here," her uncle explained, "is a cupboard actually built into the wall, which is four feet thick at this point; no one will suspect its existence, as there is nothing to be seen above the floor level."

"Why was this place made?" Cicely asked.

Her uncle shook his head.

"To hide some smugglers' booty, perhaps," he replied, "or an eccentric man's whim. You have heard how strange some of the Coxonfields were." He thrust the oblong box out of sight into the aperture, and slipped home the bolt.

The girl shivered.

"Quick, uncle," she said.

Murdoch dropped the board into place and rose.

"Come—we must get away," he said, and started to creep noiselessly down the stairs.

Cicely followed quickly.

JERRY BOILS OVER

JERRY HARTSGILL had never been noted for stoicism—he was unfitted by temperament for a watching and waiting rôle—and on this particular evening he ran considerable danger of boiling over. That blighted ass, Heath, hadn't turned up as promised!

If this was Christian gratitude, he'd have to take up Buddhism. A nice return for hospitality! Scarcely had the fellow lugged his spare shirt out of his suitcase before he calmly announced that circumstances necessitated him leaving to take up a position as gardner at Doone Hall. Gardener! . . .

And what about the promise that he (Hartsgill) should have a hand in things? A fat chance! No, all he was considered fit for was to stand outside the front door and be potted at. Eugh!

The memory of that experience caused the poet-cum-egg-merchant to switch the vials of his wrath from Ian Heath to the man who had attempted to beat out his promising young life.

Voyce. . . .

Yes, it must have been Voyce. Heath might be a confoundedly irritating bloke, but he was pretty shrewd—as a matter of fact, old Ian was as wide awake as they made 'em; had to be at his job. Heath's summing-up of the situation was no doubt correct—whilst the Secret Service man had gone gunning for Voyce, the latter had been struck with the same bright idea. With the result, however, that he had narrowly escaped killing the wrong man. A little thing like that might not matter to some people—but, by Jingo! he wasn't going to let it slide.

Filling a fresh pipe, Jerry, humped in his chair before the roaring log-fire, commenced to boil again. Heath had given him distinct instructions not to do a thing. "Until I give the word, a programme of masterly inactivity for you, old son," had been his exact words.

Confound the fellow! Did Heath think he was a kid to be told to stand in a corner? Whose business was this, anyway? Hadn't he been appointed official egg-and-fowl provider to Doone Hall? Hadn't he,

therefore, a personal interest in the girl? And, come to think of it, who had told Heath about Cicely Garrett in the first place?

He was jolly well going to rebel; yes, sir. Act on his own, show a little initiative, resolution, common sense, strategical skill, and what not. And he would start straight away. No further messing about for him.

But how soon the most roseate dawns lose their lustre! When Jerry started to consider in what way he should employ the qualities enumerated above, he had to confess that only one thing occurred to him. That was to follow slavishly in the steps of Ian Heath and pay a surprise visit to Philip Voyce's cottage.

He gave Heath another hour in which to keep the appointment he had made, and then, carefully locking up, he started out on the five miles' walk. Exactly what he intended to do when he arrived at the place he did not know, but action of some sort was necessary to ease his restlessness. And there was that revolver shot to be explained. . . .

As he trudged along (Lizzie, the ever faithful, was temporarily out of commission), Jerry pondered over the strangeness of the past few weeks. A devoted attendant at cinemas whenever he descended upon civilisation, he decided that the recent happenings at Doone Hall put the average film to shame. Who had killed that poor old buffer, Sapford, for instance? Could that vampire yarn possibly be believed?

Pausing to relight his pipe, he glanced at the time. Cæsar's overcoat! he had left it late; it was ten minutes past midnight. Heath had arranged to be at the cottage at nine-thirty. He was to have stayed an hour and then gone back to his shack in the grounds of Doone Hall.

Midnight. . . .

Jerry, apart from his poetry, was not a very imagi-

native soul. And certainly he was entirely without physical fear. Yet, as he walked on, a strange disquietude besieged him. Like a stealthy menace it clouded his senses. The feeling was quote unaccountable, but it had sprung upon him like a jungle beast.

He supposed it had been thinking about Professor Sapford's death which had caused him to get the wind up in this extraordinary fashion.

Blighted ass! Reproaching himself with his favourite objurgation, he squared his shoulders. But a second attack of the mental staggers came, and he found himself, almost without being aware of it, looking nervously around. To right and left were the stunted furze bushes peculiar to the Moor, but these, as he looked, gave forth nothing to lend shape to his uneasiness.

Owl! He castigated himself further and plunged ahead. A nice fellow to go forth to a job of work. If he was like this now, what would be his state by the time he arrived at Voyce's cottage? So panicky that the hairless one would be able to catch him by the throat and squeeze the life out of him without so much as a protesting croak.

He turned his eyes skywards. A wind seemed to have sprung up. The next moment he was literally shaking, for now he was seeing something which gave very real substance to his fears.

Hovering above him was a dimly outlined Shape. It had the form of a bat—only it was far too monstrous for any bat. It might have been a man . . . a man with wings. . . .

"Gosh!" gasped Jerry Hartsgill, and, despite the cold, the sweat poured down his face.

He knew at once what it was—the Vampire . . . the Thing that haunted Doone Hall. . . . The Vileness that flew at night . . . and killed . . . tearing

open the throats of its victims. . . . It had slain that innocent professor—and it now was haunting a fresh prey. . . .

Clenching his hands, he called up his manhood; he endeavoured to summon sufficient resolution to fight the fear which unnerved him. He told himself that it was impossible, that he was living in a time of cold reason, of deadly logic . . . but while he did so, the Thing wheeled in the sky and he noticed two glaring balls of fire looking down at him.

The Creature had eyes . . . it could see him. . . .

Ahead was a small belt of woodland. He ran for it, his knees scarcely able to carry the weight. And as he ran he prayed, for such terror as he could never have imagined had him tightly gripped. A clean death he would not have minded, but to be ravaged by that loathsome beast. . . .

Once in the shelter of the trees he fell headlong. His breath came raspingly from his tortured lungs. He was stricken.

The Thing could fly, but could it walk? How did it actually kill? Did it stand and tear with its hands . . . or its mouth? . . . Could it be hurt itself? . . .

He rose. Contempt for his former weakness swept through him. He would meet the Creature face to face.

So he waited. Yet nothing came. He could not understand it, for the Thing had evidently seen him. If those glaring balls of light had not been eyes, what could they have been . . . ?

After another wait, Jerry stepped clear of his shelter. More angry now than afraid he looked upwards. But the sky was empty of its spectre. The Vampire had passed on its horrible journey. . . .

Now came the testing time. The danger was gone, but his nerves felt like frayed strings. He could have

blubbed. . . . Spilling strange oaths, Jerry turned round. He wanted the security of stone walls, of a roof; above all, he wanted the company of Ian Heath.

But, all the same, he walked on in the direction of Philip Voyce's cottage.

He arrived there three quarters of an hour later. He had passed the place fairly frequently on Lizzie, and he knew the lay of the land rather well in consequence. Crouching behind the wall bordering the rough garden, he heard first a faint purring, and then, looking over the top of the stones, he saw the four-seated car which Voyce used.

Voyce had left his engine running. That could mean only one thing: he intended to make a journey. At that time of night. . . .

Jerry did not hesitate. It was as though the attack of funk barely an hour before was still stinging him with bitter reproaches. Climbing carefully over the wall he opened the rear door of the car, and wriggled to the floor. Voyce would take the driver's seat, of course, and there did not seem much risk of his being detected. In any case, he intended to see where the man was going that night.

He had not long to wait. But when the cottage door opened he saw, as he cautiously raised himself, two men instead of one. And, after the door was shut and locked, both came towards the car.

A voice spoke. It was Voyce talking, and yet. . . .

"You mustn't mind being bumped a bit—it's rough country between here and Tavistock."

Yes, it was Voyce speaking right enough—*but he was talking German!* Jerry, who had received part of his education in Bonn, blessed the circumstance for about the first time in his life. Voyce a German!—now why in the hell hadn't he thought of that before? Not

that it had any real significance, perhaps—but it gave him a fresh cause to dislike the man.

The answer came in the same tongue.

"When She gives the order, it is not the time to consider one's personal comfort!" The tone was a mixture of commiseration and fear with a flavor of resentment.

"You're right, Kroon—get in." Voyce was evidently top-dog in this combination, for the order was offensively abrupt.

Crouched in the back part of the car, Jerry prepared himself for a scrap. But this time he had no fear. These were human; they were flesh and blood. If the second man joined him in the back of the car the proceedings would commence. . . .

But the conflict was postponed. The man opened the other door and took the seat next to the driver.

"It's damned cold," he growled.

"There's a rug on the back seat," said his companion.

Jerry underwent a second ordeal. The rug in question *had* been on the back seat, but he had used it to cover his somewhat unwieldy frame.

He heard the man reach back. Kroon's hand groped.

"It's slipped—*ach!* here it is." The speaker's fingers had clutched the rug which the eavesdropper had lifted gently up. The next moment Jerry was without his covering. It had been a near thing.

Soon the car started to move, but even the solace of the rug had not appeased the passenger.

"I only found your cottage by a miracle," he complained; "why were you not there to meet me? I waited an hour outside in the cold."

"I had business to attend to—if you speak to me like that again, I'll throw you out of the car. Whine to Gusta if you have the nerve!"

Then—silence. In between the bumps which bruised

him in thousands of unsuspected places, Jerry had the opportunity to fit parts of the puzzle together.

The man Kroon had evidently had an appointment with Voyce at the latter's cottage. He had arrived on time only to find Voyce absent. Now they were proceeding to meet a mysterious woman known as She. . . . A bit of a bitch, this Gusta, apparently. . . . Well, it was all jolly interesting, and would be something to tell old Heath.

The car sped on. Soon it reached the outskirts of Tavistock. It avoided the main streets and drew up finally outside a pair of huge doors which appeared to be the entrance to some grounds or stables.

Voyce got down. There was a push-bell in the wall on the right, and he rang this three times. The doors opened slowly. Hartsgill could see this much, although he was unable to catch sight of the face of the person who gave an excited, low-toned greeting to Voyce.

The latter replied briefly, returned to the car and drove it in through the gates, which clanged to again. Jerry Hartsgill, finding himself inside a gloomy courtyard, felt like whistling, but restrained himself.

THE HOUSE WITH GREEN SHUTTERS

The two men got out of the car. They walked across the courtyard, and, Jerry, straining his weak-sighted eyes, saw one of them—Voyce, he thought—open a door with a key. Then both went in.

A minute later Hartsgill was at the door himself. To his disgust, but not surprise, it was locked—in any case, there was no handle outside and it would not yield to pressure.

What was he to do now? Pinch the car and get back to Heath with the news?

"Silly ass!" he remarked angrily beneath his breath; "something is going on inside this crib and it's up to you to find out what. Get a move on."

It was fiendishly dark, but he had had the sense to bring the electric torch which Ian Heath had left in reserve at the cottage. By this he saw that all the windows of this Georgian-style house were closely fastened, and that they all had green shutters. He might as well try to break into a fortress.

Yet there must be a back way in. Skirting the building on the right of the courtyard that looked like a garage, he saw a door. Opening this, he passed through into a large but apparently neglected garden. To the right was a high wall; to the left the squat heavy blackness representing the house.

Afraid to use his torch, he stumbled on in a blackness so intense that he felt for each footing before he made it. He had many minor mishaps, but the most serious was when he pitched head first into an immense bush composed of at least a million prickles.

Not many times before in his life had Jerry restrained the desire to ease an overwrought soul by full-bodied language, and, despite the circumstances, he might not have overcome the temptation now but for an unexpected happening. A dozen yards or so away from his resting-place, a door opened. A thin stream of light poured into the darkness and, sharply outlined against this, Jerry saw a man's figure.

Forgetting his bodily discomfort, Hartsgill prepared to take this lucky chance. The man had left the door open. Here was a way into the house providentially provided.

Crawling forward on his hands and knees, and dodging the gleam of light, he gained the entrance. A cautious glance showed a storm-lantern hanging from a hook jutting out from the wall. What lay imme-

diately before him then was a stone passage. More than that he could not see.

But for that light Jerry might have developed cold feet. This house, with its shuttered windows and that general air of desolation, was scarcely the place to make an uninvited call, especially when discovery might easily mean all sorts of unpleasant reprisals. He felt he would much rather have penetrated Doone Hall in spite of the vampire threat, and he longed afresh for the company of the man for whose sake he had embarked on the midnight adventure.

Stepping into the passage, he closed the door.

Then he started forward, walking as lightly as possible. His torch became useful again now. He saw huge walls to these kitchen quarters, and a flight of stone steps leading upward. By the time he had reached the top, a faint hum of voices reached him.

To his left was a large door. This was evidently the front entrance which Voyce and his companion had used. Tiptoeing to it, he flashed his torch up and down to ascertain its manner of fastening. Although there was a heavy bolt at the top and another at the bottom, these were not used. The door was fitted with a modern Yale lock. Here, anyhow, was a way of escape; all he would have to do was to lift the catch and open the door by means of the inside handle.

But retreat must come later; at the moment he had to investigate the secrets of this house.

He was now on the ground-level. There were two other doors—one was straight ahead and the other was to the right. It was from the latter that he caught again the murmurous hum of voices. Trying the handle of this second door, Jerry found that it yielded. His heart started bumping as he stepped inside. The room was in blackness. The various dark shapes bestrewn about the floor were evidently pieces of furniture,

whilst on the other side must be a door, because from beneath this there flowed a gentle radiance of light.

Suddenly he ducked. This door had been opened. A man looked through into the blackness. Jerry saw that it was Voyce. He was afraid the man would hear his heavy breathing; he was crouched in a most uncomfortable position behind a heavy round-table, against the edge of which he had brushed his head.

Had Voyce heard anything? If he came towards the door, he would have to pass him. Jerry waited breathlessly.

After a minute or so, Voyce returned to the inner room. He did not close the door, but left it a few inches ajar. When Hartsgill had crossed the floor, he was able to see into a softly illuminated apartment which, after the welter of former drabness, appeared an oasis of culture and refinement.

There were three people seated here—a heavily built, repulsive-looking woman, wearing a monocle in her left eye, Voyce, and a man whose right cheek was scarred by a deep cut which showed livid against the rest of the flesh.

The woman was asking a question in German.

"What about the man Murdoch?"

The listener caught Voyce's reply.

"Murdoch will be attended to to-morrow night," he said.

The woman looked at the door as though she had heard a sound.

"Who left that open?" she demanded angrily; "you fool!" was added with contempt.

The man he knew as Philip Voyce rose and made an angry retort before striding fiercely across the floor, and banging the door.

After that, strain his ears as he might, the listener could catch not another word.

Waiting another five minutes, he decided to go. He had heard enough.

It amused him, after leaving by the front door, to borrow the waiting motor-car. This, a few minutes later, he abandoned on the outskirts of the Moor.

"And if you don't think there's anything in it, just say so!" concluded Jerry. He was peeved because of the other's seeming indifference.

Ian Heath thumped the narrator on the shoulder with a mould-encrusted hand.

"On the contrary, old man, I think there's a devil of a lot in it. You performed a priceless night's work, Jerry. Risking all you held dear, you penetrated to the evil lair. . . ."

"I say," came the interruption, "that paw of yours is filthy—can't you wash it?"

"Later," was the reply; "how can you expect me to be a gardener unless I have the local colour? From your description, I gather that the amiable lady is Gusta Straube, a very old friend of mine—'friend' being in the Pickwickian sense. There is no need to speculate why she is here—everything revolves round this man Murdoch's invention."

"You say you have met this woman before?" inquired Hartsgill.

"Many, many times, old boy! The Life and Doings of Gusta Straube would be a godsend to the average sensational novelist; that is, if the stuff wasn't scoffed at as being so highly improbable. This German heavyweight is not only the most dangerous spy of modern times, but a woman with absolutely no moral sense."

Hartsgill sniffed.

"I thought the day of spy stories was over."

"H'm. The average person may have that opinion, but let me tell you, Jerry, that there's a darned sight

more espionage going on at the present time than even before the war. There are lashings of agents all over England; we know most of them, and they aren't allowed to get away with much that is really valuable, you can bet, but near every naval port, army camp, and air force station there are men and women listening with all their ears at bar-counters, tea fights, bridge parties, etcetera. Warfare secrets have a high market value nowadays. But they must think a lot of Warren Murdoch's invention to have troubled to send Gusta out here."

"What puzzles me," said Hartsgill in a tone of bewilderment; "is how the devil these things get about! Here we have a fellow working secretly on something in one of the loneliest spots in the country and yet the story leaks out! How?

Heath smiled.

"To tell you that, Jerry, would mean a more or less detailed description of modern Intelligence work—and that would take too long. It's sufficient to say that every man of any note in the scientific world to-day is being kept under observation by enemy agents for fear he should be working on something which might be useful to his country in time of war. But that's beside the point; what I want you to repeat are the exact words that Voyce used to Gusta Straube."

The poet laid down his pipe.

"He said—and, my hat! I shall never forget his voice!—that she could count on quick action now. Murdoch would be attended to to-morrow night!"

"That means to-night."

"Yes. There might have been a good deal more, but I couldn't catch it after the door was banged. Perhaps they were afraid of being overheard. But I got that plain enough. Look here, Ian, you needn't think that I'm going to be kept out of this any longer.

If these swine make a mass attack, you'll want a bit of help. There's the girl—Miss Garrett—to be considered—and—and——"

"Spit it out, old son."

"Well, you may laugh at me, but I've got the idea that Voyce has been grinning up his sleeve ever since you came down here. It is my belief that he recognised you not only as Ronald Gavin, the coal-merchant, but also as George Amos, the gardener."

"And yet, you perisher, when I suggested the self-same thing—as regards Gavin, at least—you laughed me to scorn and intimated that my conceit was insufferable! Still, never mind, Jerry—any further bright thoughts before we close down for the night?"

"If you want to know, I think that that trio are cooking up something special for you personally. And it won't spoil by the keeping."

"Perhaps you are right, Jerry. Gusta has some accounts to settle with me, and I have more than one to settle with her. As for the massed offensive, I have a rather bright lad coming down from Town to-morrow. He was present at a London pestilential night-club the other p.m., when he saw an affecting meeting between the massive Gusta and the fellow Kroon. . . . Blazes!" he broke off to exclaim, "I knew I'd met that cove before—it was in a somewhat fruity dust-up in one of the back alleys of Constantinople a few months back. He was working for the fair Gusta then as he is now. Funny that I couldn't place him in London."

"You have now, so there's no need to worry," replied Hartsgill. "But after giving you the warning for squalls, what do you intend to do?" The speaker, as always, thirsted for action.

The reply was prompt.

"You and I are going to slip over to the Hall. We will spend the night there. Whilst you squat on the

steps of the laboratory, I'll do a little meandering: there's a gentleman with half his face missing I'm rather anxious to meet."

"I'd rather meet *him* than the Winged Gentleman," replied his companion.

Heath caught his arm.

"The Vampire—have you seen that?"

"By gosh! I have—last night, half way to Philip Voyce's cottage."

Heath made no further comment. He appeared lost in thought.

THE SCREAM

THAT same night as Cicely was preparing to retire, a stone flung at the window attracted her attention. She obeyed this simple prearranged signal by stealing down to the front door.

Outside was a man in disreputable clothes.

"Miss Garrett," said Heath, "my friend Hartsgill and I would like to spend the night in the Hall. Oh no, we don't want to sleep—only Jerry here confesses he is afraid to go home in the dark. He's a frightfully timid fellow, you know—has been from a child up. Do you mind the infliction?"

She looked at him steadily.

"Tell me frankly, Mr. Heath—have you a special reason for coming?"

"Absolutely no!" he lied; "the fact is," he improvised quickly, "I simply hate for you to sleep here every night with only your uncle to look after you."

"You forget Neale. He has improved in his manner tremendously lately. I feel myself almost trusting him."

"Yes," replied Heath slowly, "I think you are justified in trusting Neale—now."

She was evidently surprised.

"You have discovered something about him?"

"The information was thrust at me—I hadn't to discover it. But what I know certainly makes me feel inclined to think that Neale is not the shady customer we at one time thought he was."

"You will not tell me more than that?"

"There is no need now. Later on I will give you full details. At the moment, Miss Garrett, I want you to go quietly to bed and to leave the safeguarding of the house to Hartsgill and myself."

"You anticipate that something will happen to-night?"

"I wish to be in the position to prevent anything happening."

With that she had to be content. Heath felt a cur for having said so much, but it was useless to lie. Besides, this girl, he knew, would prefer the truth: she was of the right metal. One thing he promised himself: when all this traffic in intrigue and crime was past and done with, he would ask her to give him just two minutes. What he intended saying during those two minutes would be the most momentous words he had ever uttered. How would she take them? Would she flush and say it was impossible, or would she—? But on this he could only conjecture. Whatever she said in reply, he knew he would never meet another girl like her.

"Good-night, Mr. Heath—and thank you for all you are doing." Her hand rested in his for a fragment of time which he wished could have been an eternity.

Hartsgill coughed after Cicely had disappeared up the staircase.

"If you should ever want anything in the shape of a best man—" and then mumbled himself into silence at the sight of Heath's face.

It was three hours later.

Heath felt the bedroom door, against which he had his back, give. He sprang to his feet to find Warren Murdoch clad only in his sleeping-clothes.

"Where are you going, sir?" he demanded.

He sensed the next moment that he was speaking to a man whose state of mind was abnormal. Murdoch looked like a person in a trance. The inventor's will power had been conquered; unless he was entirely wrong, Murdoch, through some unknown devilry, was obeying the dictates of a mind stronger than his own. In a flash, Heath realized what must have happened: Murdoch was under some sort of hypnotic suggestion. But whose? And how had it been done?

Murdoch was speaking.

The reply came slowly, each word being clearly enunciated.

"I—am—going—into—the—grounds."

It was an experience which Heath knew he would never forget—the vision of this grey-faced little man, robbed of his normality, being forced to walk into the drear grounds outside where Death might be lurking for him. He took Murdoch's arm and peered into his expressionless face. In the dead of night, standing in that draughty corridor, the only light the electric torch which he carried, there was a macabre element about the affair which set his nerves tingling.

"Why are you going into the grounds, sir?" he asked. As he spoke he looked straight into Murdoch's eyes: there was only one chance of learning the truth —that was to endeavour to oust the mental power now controlling this unfortunate man by a yet stronger will —his own.

"Answer me!" he said sharply.

The bemused man stared at him unseeingly.

"I want to lie on the spot where my poor friend

Sapford was killed," he replied; "I have an appointment with Sapford. . . . I must go."

"But you cannot see Sapford—he is dead. You must return to bed." With the words, Heath endeavoured to guide the inventor back into the bedroom, but the action received violent opposition, Murdoch struggling hard to get away.

"I—must—see—Sapford," he repeated.

The tussle, sharp as it was, was bound to have only one ending, and Heath managed to push the man inside just as pattering footsteps were heard coming along the corridor.

"Mr. Heath—whatever is the matter?" asked Cicely Garrett.

He pretended to be stern.

"Didn't I give you strict injunctions to go to sleep?"

"I tried—I really tried. But I was kept awake: I had the feeling that something was bound to happen. Was that my uncle you were struggling with?"

"Yes. He is not quite normal."

"Not quite normal?" Her eyes were wide with wonder.

"Something is obsessing him. He told me he had an appointment with his friend Sapford in the grounds. I tried to argue with him, but it was useless: he was in a kind of trance and was not responsible."

"But who could have got him into this state?—no one has been here to-night."

"Philip Voyce called this afternoon and he had a long talk with your uncle—it's in that direction we shall have to look. The two were alone—who can tell what took place? Your uncle, I should say, would be very susceptible to suggestion. I have seen in the East some remarkable examples of men controlled by other minds, and Voyce would seem to have the faculty. During the talk he had with your uncle this afternoon

I haven't the least doubt but what he placed a subconscious bond over Warren Murdoch's will. This would mean that your uncle would be forced to obey any suggestion which his master-mind made to him."

"Even although Voyce was not present to-night?"

"Even although Voyce was not present. Space does not make any difference in such matters, provided that the mental control is sufficiently strong. Once in Budapest I remember a case in which a man whose mind had been temporarily captured in this way was forced to commit a murder——"

"Ghastly!" commented the listener; "you don't think——?"

Heath was reluctant to tell her what he guessed to be the truth. Instead, he patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"We must make sure that your uncle does not leave his room—then there cannot be any danger," he said.

From inside the bedroom there came a confused sound, and Cicely grew panic-stricken.

"The window!" she gasped; "open the door!"

Swallowing an oath at his own stupidity, Heath unlocked the door and rushed inside. The room was in darkness, but against the window on the far side they could see a man. There was a crash of shattered glass. . . .

Heath moved as fast as he had ever moved in his life. Even then it seemed as though he would be too late—the wild leap he made only enabled him to catch Murdoch's legs as the inventor sprang head first through the window.

The struggle that ensued was furious; Murdoch seemed possessed of a madman's strength. But eventually he was calmed. His breathing became steady, and, falling back into Cicely's arms, he slept like an over-tired child.

"A close call," commented Heath.

He had scarcely uttered the words before the tense silence of the night was shattered by an agonised scream.

Heath sprang up.

"It came from the grounds; I must go and see. Stay here," he ordered sharply.

As he rushed headlong down the staircase he knew he would be too late: that scream had been the death-cry of a murderer's victim.

THE SECOND MURDER

Heath raced downstairs at a headlong pace. That shrill scream had burned itself into his brain. Revolted at what he was afraid he would presently see, he was urged on by the fierce, dynamic determination to seize the murderer and kill him with his bare hands.

If only he were in time: that was the point. Confound the cursed darkness! How could people tolerate a house which had not electric light?

He reached the great front door, but grazed his knuckles in trying to slide back the top bolt. Then, in his eagerness, the bottom one stuck . . . and after that there was the key to be turned. And the precious minutes were flying. . . . Just one puzzle flitted across his mind as he plunged into the darkness: what purpose could Voyce—if Voyce was the actual murderer—have had in desiring to kill Warren Murdoch? Surely for his purpose the inventor would be better alive than dead?

He had taken barely half a dozen steps before he felt a hand slipped into his.

"Don't go! I cannot stand any more. . . . If you should be killed . . . !"

He stopped long enough to raise the cold hand to his lips.

"I shan't be killed—I shall come back to you," was what he replied. "Believe that—and now you must return indoors. Lock the door—don't let anyone in. When I come back I'll knock three times—until then, open to no one."

Behind him, as he rushed away, he caught the sound of a little whimpering cry, instantly suppressed. God bless her brave heart!

He required a good deal of resolution as he faced the unknown. For all he knew, he might be going to his own death; that scream might be merely a snare; it would be characteristically cunning of the enemy to have prepared a trap for his too-eager feet.

But this thought caused him to dash ahead with greater speed. From the first moment he had met Voyce a natural hatred of the man had been born and circumstances were racing them to an inevitable dénouement. He hoped it might come soon—that night.

The gate leading to the bowling-green was open. A dozen yards brought him fact to face with a standing figure. He would have leapt at it had not a voice he recognized addressed him.

"I am glad you have come, sir," said Neale.

"What are you doing here?" The flood of former suspicions against the butler returned. "I am a detective, as perhaps you have guessed, and I want the truth."

"I heard a scream, sir." The man showed no surprise at Heath's announcement.

"Were you in bed?" Neale was fully dressed.

"No, sir, I was—" He hesitated.

"I warn you not to fool with me, Neale. Where were you when you heard the scream?"

"In my sitting-room near the kitchen, sir."

"Why should you be there at this time in the morning?"

Heath could hear the man's teeth chattering.

"Were you talking to your relative Gibson? Out with it; I know all about that matter. I met Gibson in the grounds the other night and he told me his story. I am trying to help him."

"You know that, sir? I had better tell you all about it."

"Yes, Neale, you certainly had—but we'll find out about that scream first."

The man turned and walked ahead, Heath keeping close by his side.

In this way they started to make a survey of the large, untidy lawn. Heath was positive it was here that he would make his "find," but when the discovery came, he was stricken with fresh astonishment.

"It's here, sir—I nearly stumbled over it!" Neale, who had been walking six feet or so away from him, stopped and turned. "Oh, God!" he added shrilly, covering his face with his hands.

True enough, a body lay prone beneath them. One glance, by the aid of Heath's electric torch, showed that the man was dead—horribly dead.

But the man was a stranger to Heath—he was not able to recognize the sallow face, rendered dreadful by terror.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Mr. Grinstead, sir."

"The Tavistock solicitor?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps Miss Garrett has mentioned his name?"

"She has. But what could have brought him here at this time of night? Do you know?"

"Yes, sir, I know," admitted the butler in a low tone.

"I shall expect you to tell me. As I have already

said, I am connected with the police, and I am staying on here for the purpose of investigating a good many things about Doone Hall. You would be well advised, however, to keep that information strictly under your hat."

"I quite understand, sir."

"One more question, Neale, and answer it truthfully —did you kill this man?"

"No, sir!—I swear it, sir!"

"Did you have any hand in killing him?"

"No, sir—when I last saw Mr. Grinstead he was perfectly well. That was only about twenty minutes ago."

Heath studied the man's face.

"I must have your story," he said.

The butler, after a moment's hesitation, started:

"I am glad of this opportunity, sir, of trying to clear my character. You already know about Gibson, but there was another matter which had caused me a great deal of anxiety. A few months ago—whilst I was in the employ of Mr. Charles Coxonfield—I committed a grave misdemeanor. I stole £150 belonging to my master."

"Your reason?"

"It may not seem a very important reason to you, sir, but it was a vital one to me. My wife, who has always been an invalid, was desperately ill with a spinal complaint. An immediate operation by an expensive London surgeon was necessary to attempt to save her life. I had not the money myself, and when I applied to Mr. Coxonfield for the loan of the amount, my master, who was a very hard man, refused point blank."

"There were the hospitals, Neale," remarked Heath in a more kindly tone.

"I know, sir. But I wanted my wife to have the very best attention, and I was afraid she would have to wait to get into one of the big London hospitals.

"So I took the money, sir. Whilst my wife was away in London, Mr. Coxonfield fell ill. Shortly afterwards he died. I had thought that my theft would pass unnoticed—and, believe me, sir, if I could have found any way of paying it back, I would—but this man Grinstead discovered it. Instead of tackling me with it he held the threat over my head, letting me know that he always had the power of sending me to prison. That is the reason, sir, why, when he told me this morning that he was going to call at the Hall at one o'clock, I dared not refuse admitting him."

"I understand the position exactly, Neale. Now what happened after his arrival? Tell it your own way."

"Well, sir, he turned up at one o'clock as arranged. I let him in through the back door. He was very nervous and fussy, and I could see at once that he was in a state of great excitement. I myself was very worried. For one thing, I knew that you and Mr. Hartsgill were in the house, and I guessed that *you,* at least, must be a detective. There was already a lot of suspicion against me, I felt, and I was afraid of one of you catching Grinstead and me talking.

"I told Grinstead there were two men in the house, one of whom I thought was a detective, but he was inclined to scoff."

" 'Detective?' "

" 'Investigating the murder of Professor Sapford,' " I explained.

"He told me I was allowing my imagination to run away with me. He said there was no longer any interest in Professor Sapford's death.

"I replied that I didn't agree, saying that there had

been far too many peculiar things going on at the Hall lately—apart from the murder—and that it was my belief Miss Cicely had engaged a detective to find out what it all meant.

"Grinstead merely snapped his fingers at this, and then told me why he had come that night."

"That's what I want to know," remarked Heath.

"Well, sir, what he told me was this: He said there was something valuable hidden away somewhere in the Hall, and that he had come to find it."

"Did he mention Mr. Murdoch's invention?"

"Not by name, sir. He didn't go into any details; he simply said that this something, which was valuable, belonged by rights to him——"

"A lie, of course."

"I dare say, sir."

"What happened then?"

"He described a certain book which he said was in the library, and asked me to fetch it. According to what I could make out, this book, which was a history of the Coxonfield family, contained the description of the hiding-place where Grinstead imagined this valuable something was secreted. After I had returned from the library I was supposed to help him in the search. I pointed out, of course, that anything which was found in the Hall must belong to my present master, Mr. Murdoch. He blazed up at that, and said that if I didn't help him he would hand me over to the police straight away. He brought up about Gibson—he'd found out how I used to feed Gibson on the quiet—and then practically admitted that his object in getting me kept on as butler at the Hall was to help him with his dirty work when the time came. That time had come to-night. Grinstead admitted that he was leaving England in the morning."

"I dare say the police would be interested in that

item of news," remarked Heath. After a pause, he asked a question: "Did he explain why he did not get the book when he was staying at the Hall a few days ago?"

"No, sir. What he did say, though, was that he had only just learned about the existence of the valuable thing he was after."

"It's a queer yarn, Neale. Did you go to the library for the book?"

"I went under compulsion, sir. I couldn't find the book, and when I returned to the little sitting-room, where I had left Grinstead, he had gone. Shortly after that I heard the scream, rushed out—and then I saw you, sir."

"Have you any idea why Grinstead should have gone into the grounds?"

"None whatever, sir. It struck me as being funny at the time. The only thing I can think is that he must have taken sudden fright."

"H'm."

GONE!

HEATH now concentrated upon examining the dead body.

One fact was clear: a dreadful atrocity had been duplicated; but for the difference in the clothes, this corpse might have belonged to the first victim of the unknown killer's blood-lust. There was the same unnerving expression of uncontrollable terror depicted on the face; the dead man had assumed the same position as Sapford in his death-throes . . . and there was the same ghastly tear in the throat. . . .

Heath looked at the butler.

"It looks as though the Vampire had been at work again," he remarked.

"It's horrible to look at, sir," was the reply of the shuddering man. "Miss Cicely mustn't be allowed to see it."

"Miss Garrett will not see it, Neale; in fact, I shall arrange for her and Mr. Murdoch to leave the house as soon as possible."

"She will be very glad to go, sir—Doone Hall has been a horrible house for any young lady to live in."

"Neale, I wish you would tell me one thing—do you personally believe in this family Vampire?"

The butler pointed downwards.

"That's pretty good evidence, sir, of something of the sort, isn't it? All I know is that, while the story of the Coxonfield Curse has been in existence ever since I can remember—and I've been in these parts since I was a boy—nothing ever happened until quite recently. There were stories, of course; men crossing the Moor late at night would say they had seen something . . . but no murder was done until that poor Mr. Sapford was found."

"Have you ever seen anything yourself?"

Neale hesitated, but only momentarily.

"One night my wife woke me with a scream. Gave me quite a turn. She said she saw something black passing the window. I told her it was her imagination, but she wouldn't have it. That's all I know, sir; I've never seen anything myself. Do you believe in it, sir? You're an educated man, used to things, if I may put it that way. What's your idea? To me it seems against reason."

"It wouldn't do for me to tell you what I think, Neale—but there's certainly evidence here of some fiend being at work again, and it's my job to bring him to justice."

"You think it's a man, then, sir, and not a—creature?"

"I have already said, Neale, that it wouldn't do for me to tell you yet exactly what I think. I intend, however, to trust you."

"Thank you, sir."

"You would be ill-advised to let me down."

"I realise that, sir. Just put me to the test. The death of this man, horrible as it is, has removed a tremendous weight off my mind. I shall be able to look the world in the face again now, sir."

"I understand, Neale. Can I rely upon you to keep watch over the body while I make a search before going back to the house?"

"Yes, sir."

The entire manner of the man had changed so that he seemed a different person. The former hang-dog atmosphere with which he had surrounded himself had given place to a straightforward demeanour.

A thorough survey of the grounds, conducted as systematically as the dense darkness would allow, revealed nothing, and he returned to Neale.

"I am going to the house," he told the butler.

As he turned to walk back to the front door, Heath was thinking more of Cicely Garrett than the murderer, the trophy of whose foulness lay on the bowling-green. It was essential that both she and her uncle should leave Doone Hall as soon as the police would allow them to depart. Warren Murdoch could take his invention and place it in a deposit vault, or secure its safety in some other reliable way. In any case, they would both have to leave Dartmoor; the hidden dangers clustered round them here were too great.

He clenched his teeth at the thought of how impotent he had been up till now. With the exception of that job to-night all the tricks were with Voyce and his crowd. They had committed outrage after outrage, and he—the self-elected defender of the girl and her

uncle—had been forced to stand more or less idly by.

But now they were at close grips. The presence of Gusta Straube in the neighbourhood portended some special *coup*. She meant to take to Germany Warren Murdoch's invention, and she would apply characteristically ruthless methods. The first step in that campaign of terror had been the murder of Professor Sapford. How much had he been forced to tell of the invention before he was killed? Enough, perhaps, to increase the determination of these German spies to obtain possession of this new war machine. Then had been planned the murder of the inventor himself. Why this should have been done he still could not understand—surely a live Warren Murdoch would have been better than a dead one from Gusta Straube's point of view? Only by a merciful chance—good old Jerry!—had this second tragedy been averted. Instead of Warren Murdoch straying into the grounds under hypnotic control, that elderly solicitor, Moses Grinstead, had gone to meet his unexpected death. He must have been mistaken in the darkness for Murdoch.

A slight sense of elation came to Heath. In Voyce, he was meeting a formidable opponent. What a nerve the fellow possessed! No wonder Gusta Straube had picked him as her first lieutenant. And, so far, he had not left a single clue. Yes, there was one—what he had discovered in his bedroom at the cottage. But that, at least in the eyes of the ordinary jury, would probably mean nothing. The main thing was that the man had been too clever to leave any trace. To hope to persuade the local police that Voyce was directly or indirectly responsible for the two terrible crimes that had been committed was a hopeless task. What was to be done he would have to do himself; officially—that was speaking from the police point of view—there was

no shadow of a case against the man. There was plenty of surmise and heaps of conjecture, but nothing more; Voyce could remain in perfect safety in the neighbourhood; indeed, he shouldn't be surprised if the fellow did actually pay another call during the next few hours. When he discovered that Warren Murdoch was still alive (if he was not already aware of the fact, which was extremely likely) he would commiserate with the inventor upon the fresh perplexing trouble that had descended upon his household and go away to hatch another piece of devilry. So far he was master of the situation, and had certainly called the tune. But the uneven balance would not be allowed to remain, Heath decided, as he made the prearranged signal with Cicely by knocking three times on the front door.

There was no reply. Not greatly perturbed because he remembered that he had been away for over half an hour, and the girl must have found her vigil in the draughty hall uncomfortably cold, he knocked again —louder this time.

Still there was no reply. Seized by a sudden alarm, he tried the door. It was immovable.

He wasted a few moments in reflection. They were uneasy seconds. From one who knew no fear for himself, he turned into a man hugely nervous—about someone else: a slip of a girl—courageous, fragrant, and rare—the thought of whose eyes, as he had last seen them, caused his heart to thud against his ribs. Heath shuffled his feet like a schoolboy going down a dark country lane, and felt mortally afraid.

He raced back to the bowling-green.

"Have you a key of the front door, Neale?" he asked the butler, who was standing guard like a soldier.

"No, sir—but I left the back door open, sir; has anything fresh happened?"

The fear which had stricken Heath increased.

"You left a door open?"

"Yes, sir—the back door." Neale was astonished to hear his listener groan.

"Why, sir——?"

But Heath had left him, running like a madman towards the back of the house.

He arrived panting. Then his heart seemed to turn over. Neale must have been mistaken: the door was shut!

It was only when he tried the handle that his misgivings returned. Like the front door, it was locked.

He became frantic. He had the conviction that the forces of evil arrayed against him had struck again—and in the most vital spot. If Cicely had been taken. . . .

He flung himself against the door, and it gave. The ruined lock sent a wave of discordance crashing into the stillness.

Flashing the light from his torch, he raced through the place. First he explored the passage into which the door of the laboratory opened, where Jerry Hartsgill should have been on guard, but wasn't; then into the small sitting-room near the kitchen which Neale had recently described to him. After that, upstairs, incoherent curses on his lips and the wildest fear in his heart, for the hall had likewise been deserted.

"Cicely!"

Outside the bedroom in which he had locked Warren Murdoch he called, but no reply came to hearten him. Then on down the corridor, his feet now like leaden weights.

He burst into the room which he guessed was Cicely's and stumbled over something that lay directly inside the door. In trying to save himself, he plunged headlong, crashing his head against the floor.

The noise he made would have awakened a drunken man, let alone a highly wrought girl. As he rose he knew that all his fears had been realised: the house did not contain Cicely Garrett.

For several seconds, standing there in the darkness, he lashed himself with bitter fury. The scream had been a snare—and he had fallen into it. Whilst he was gone the swine had entered by some means, perhaps through the door which Neale had left open, and had kidnapped the girl.

Where was she now? His imagination supplied all kinds of replies, and they were all distressing. If Gusta Straube, that she-devil . . .

He rallied himself with a tremendous effort. The mischief had been done, partly through his carelessness, and counter-action was essential.

An examination provided him with scarcely anything in the way of clues. There was little confusion—practically nothing but the overturned chair against which he had stumbled.

But Cicely was gone: the fact remained.

He left the room and returned along the corridor.

The key was still in the lock of Warren Murdoch's door; he turned it and went inside.

There was no sound from the darkness.

Then the light from his torch showed a huddled shape lying across the bed.

Approaching he saw it was the inventor.

Another glance—and he knew that Warren Murdoch was dead.

NIGHTMARE

Cicely wrapped her dressing-gown closer.

The door had shut, and now she was alone. Alone! Somewhere in the house were other people—her uncle,

the Neales, and possibly Mr. Hartsgill, although she had not seen him for some time—but they did not count. Directly Ian Heath had gone, she felt horribly lonely.

That scream! . . . Why had the others in the house not stirred? Possibly the sound had not reached the basement quarters where Hartsgill was supposed to be watching the laboratory, but the Neales should have heard it. And her uncle.

She would have liked to have gone upstairs to comfort her uncle, but she could not leave her post. Any moment Ian Heath might return, and, in reply to the signal of three knocks on the door, he would expect immediate entrance. A great deal might depend on his being able to get back into the house without delay.

No other sound had followed that eerie, paralysing scream. A deep silence reigned. It was a stillness so tense that she could hear her own breathing. The ticking of the clock in the corner of the hall sounded preposterously loud.

Whilst the cold penetrated into her very bones, she pondered, morbidly fascinated, over the shriek which had sent Ian Heath dashing out into the darkness. Who had uttered it?—and what did it mean? What fresh horror had it represented? Certainly it must have meant danger of some sort . . . and perhaps death.

And the man she now knew she loved had gone out to face it. For her sake he had gone, to protect her . . . but he might not come back.

Something wet dropped on to her hand. She was crying.

Almost angrily she dashed the tears away. She mustn't cry; she mustn't be such a fool. That was stupid weakness—she had to show some spirit. Hers was the easiest part: she merely had to wait. Ian would be ashamed of her if she broke down. She must be

worthy . . . somehow. And she must be faithful. When that heavy front door had closed, her heart had turned sick, but she must have hope. Yes, she must have hope. Ian would not fail, and she must not fail him in turn: his life might hang on how quickly she could open the door when he gave the signal. Not before . . . no, she must not open it before. . . .

Her thoughts were becoming confused. She was repeating phrases to herself. It was the continued silence which was making her so nervy. If only something would happen! If only Ian would bang on the door!

This hall, lit only by a single lamp—how huge it was! How full of dark corners! A faint grating sound away to the left caused little electric waves to crawl over her body before she decided it was only a mouse. A couple of months before she might have been frightened by a mouse, but now . . .

Yet that noise, slight as it was, broke up the deathly stillness. Cicely found herself anticipating other sounds: she grew curiously expectant. And as time—an eternity of time—went on, this expectancy strengthened and deepened into a foreboding. Something was due to happen: she felt certain of it—but what?

The temptation to open the door and rush out into the grounds grew so strong that she had to fight it relentlessly. It was the strain of waiting in that great house with no one near which was sapping her mental strength.

She turned swiftly. There *was* someone there. There were whispering voices plotting against her in the gloom at the back of the small circle of light thrown by the hall lamp. Evil whisperings, they were, dealing with her ruin.

She faced about, using up all her remaining nervous strength, and walked not only through the hall, but into the adjoining room. There was no one there. She

told herself this time after time, and yet when she had regained her place of vigil the whisperings broke out afresh. It was intolerable.

Why didn't Ian return? An end would be put to it then. Hand in hand they would go through the terror-ridden house, and he would laugh at all her fears. But still the silence brooded, scratched, as a ghostly finger might scratch on glass, by the whispers from the dark corners.

She could stand it no longer.

"Ian! Ian!" she cried.

An answer came almost immediately. Behind were footsteps. He must have come in through a window, or, perhaps, the back door. . . .

The footsteps were very quiet. Of course, he did not wish to startle her.

"Ian!"

Her hands were outstretched.

Then she recoiled, terror so real gripping her that she was unable to speak: through the dark hall stalked a yet darker shape. Black it was all over . . . even the face. . . .

She stood stricken awaiting its coming. Whether man or woman, she could not decide; it was dressed in a skin-tight costume, and either its face was as black as a negro's or it was wearing a mask.

It gave no sound, but, reaching her, clapped a paw that reeked of some suffocating drug over her mouth. She sagged into nothingness, and then a blankness blotting out everything enveloped her.

Time came to an end.

The room was furnished with some degree of elegance, but a cloudy dampness pervaded the atmosphere. The heavy reek of the cigarette the woman was smoking mixed unpalatably.

"An explanation is due to you, Miss Garrett."

Cicely, struggling to blend the picture into something intelligible, looked at the speaker. She saw, lounging opposite her on a divan, a woman, from whose face evil sprang.

"Who are you?" she asked.

She said the words with trembling lips. One glance at this woman's face had made her afraid, but a second look turned her heart quite cold; beneath the wrap the woman wore was a black, skin-tight costume such as a music-hall trapeze artist uses. Clearly outlined was the woman's opulent figure. It was she, then, who had taken her away from Doone Hall that night.

Nothing more remained to complete her uneasiness. A man enemy she could have faced, but this woman was terrifying. She kept regarding her with an expression which was enigmatically base.

"Answer the questions I shall put to you," said the woman. Her voice was harsh and guttural. "Has your uncle perfected his invention?"

Cicely braced herself. She was now beginning to understand. Events were shaping themselves to a definite end. From the beginning she had known everything had centred round the invention—and here was proof.

"I refuse to say."

The woman ground the stump of her cigarette into an ash-tray of brass.

"Little fool!" she sneered; "you do not realise to whom you are talking. Do you think I undertook what I did to-night to be told by a white-faced chit that she —refuses? Let this sink into your head and saturate whatever brains you may possess—before the night is out, you will tell me everything I ask you about Warren Murdoch's war-machine, or I will"—she rose and crossed to the girl—*"burn you to death!"* The threat

was uttered in a tone of almost mad intensity. "I will give you ten minutes to compose your mind."

The woman turned, crossed the room, and disappeared through a door at the other end.

Directly she was alone Cicely groped herself to a chair. Her weakness was prostrating.

What was this place? She knew why she had been brought there—but where was it? How far from Doone Hall?

She had time now to examine the room. It was large and entirely commonplace. The furniture had some pretensions to elegance, but the walls were mouldering with damp (this accounted for the earthy smell) and there was a general air of decay. This room had not been lived in for a long time. She was in an old house, she decided—an old house which had recently become occupied.

The room was lit by two unshaded electric bulbs, one at either end. It must still be night. How long she had remained unconscious she could not tell, but it had been long enough for her enemies to thrust a motor-rug round her over the dressing-gown.

Escape! Was there any chance?

She was halfway across the room when one of the two doors opened.

A man entered.

She recognised in him her assailant outside the St. John's Theatre.

THE CUP OVERFLOWS

HEATH was stupefied for the moment.

Events were happening with such rapidity that he was stunned. First the disappearance of Cicely, and now the unexpected death of her uncle. When he had left Murdoch the man had appeared in good health;

indeed, his physical strength had been astonishing.

He examined the body carefully without disturbing it. His medical knowledge was slight, but he came to the conclusion that the inventor must have died a natural death.

The task would fall to him to tell Cicely. He hated the prospect. Then came the realisation that the duty would have to be postponed; Cicely had gone—vanished! . . .

Heath felt for the moment unable to go on. He slumped into a chair a beaten man. Where *could* Cicely have gone? What *could* have happened to her?

Jerry! Of course! He had forgotten Jerry. By the way, where the dickens *was* Jerry? He remembered he hadn't been in the passage outside the laboratory when he passed through. But Jerry must be in the house somewhere. He might know something. If there had been any disturbance Jerry would possibly have heard it and gone to the girl's assistance.

But after pelting downstairs, there was yet another surprise awaiting him: Jerry Hartsgill had disappeared as mysteriously as the girl. Nor did a systematic search of the whole house reveal any trace of either of them. As he returned to the hall, Heath begun to fear that he was going mad.

After a minute's rest he went into the grounds again. He was beyond incredulity now; he was shock-proof; he would not have been the least surprised to find Neale either missing or lying dead across the murdered body of Moses Grinstead.

But Neale was still living, and standing guard according to his instructions. Looking at Heath's face, he craned forward.

"Has anything happened, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"A good deal—I cannot find either Miss Garrett or Mr. Hartsgill—and Mr. Murdoch is dead!"

"Mr. Murdoch dead, sir?" There was a quaver in the butler's voice.

Heath nodded.

"From heart failure, I should say."

The butler put a shaking hand up to his forehead.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I'd like to see that my wife is all right. This night's doings may be the death of her."

"Of course, Neale," Heath said, rather vaguely; "I am afraid I had forgotten about your wife. Look here, I will come back with you—she may be able to tell us something."

But Janet Neale was not able to throw any light on the mystery.

"I didn't tell you, James," she said to her husband, "but I took a sleeping-draught to-night—I hadn't been able to get any real rest for so many nights that I went into a chemist's when I was in Tavistock yesterday and——"

Heath broke in.

"You didn't hear anything suspicious then, Mrs. Neale?"

"No, sir. I was sound asleep. Why——?"

Heath made a sign to the butler.

"You must prepare yourself for some bad news, Janet," said Neale. "Miss Cicely has disappeared, and this gentleman, who's a detective, is very anxious about her."

"Oh, dear!" moaned the woman; "the poor lamb! But where could she have gone?"

"That is what I have to find out," replied Heath grimly; "all right, Mrs. Neale, I won't worry you any more. But I shall want you, Neale."

"Yes, sir."

When they were standing in the hall again Heath gave his opinion.

"It's my belief Miss Garrett was taken out of the house by force."

"Kidnapped, you mean, sir?"

"Yes. Although why Mr. Hartsgill, who was keeping watch outside the laboratory, did not hear anything, I cannot understand."

The butler spoke eagerly.

"Perhaps he wasn't in the house to hear it, sir. You say Mr. Hartsgill was keeping guard outside the laboratory. He may have gone after the intruders and got hurt himself."

"Yes, it's an idea."

"You may depend that's what happened, sir," persisted the butler; "if it hadn't, your friend would still be in the house."

At the thought that one of the best pals he had ever known was perhaps lying smashed-up somewhere in these abominable grounds, which had already been the scene of so much tragedy and horror, Ian caught the butler's arm.

"We must make another search, Neale," he ordered.

"Very good, sir."

A thick night mist had crept up, and it was a beastly and thankless task going through that jungle of weeds, helped only by a pair of electric-torches. But at the end of half an hour, Heath, who had left the grounds, had some reward.

"There were two motor-cars waiting here to-night, Neale," he said, pointing to tyre-marks in the soft mould of the track that led away from the Hall.

"One probably belonged to Mr. Grinstead, sir—I know he came by car."

"And the other to either the murderer or the person who took Miss Garrett away." He had an increasing conviction who the latter was, and the knowledge was unnerving—so much so that only by tremendous self-

control was he able to keep command over himself.

"There were several people here, judging by the state of the footprints," he continued, shedding the light from his torch on to the ground. "But if this happened whilst we were in the grounds, Neale, why didn't we hear anything?"

"Because we had the Hall between us, sir; the bowling-green is in the opposite direction."

Heath growled in assent. No, the people who had taken Cicely, and probably lured Hartsgill away to keep her company, never made much noise. They worked silently, like most people of the darkness.

"What about the police, sir?"

"Yes, Neale. One of us must inform them—the Ford car is available, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir—the Ford is ready. Are you going?"

"Yes. You must remain here."

The butler clearly did not like the prospect, but he answered after only a moment's hesitation.

"Yes, sir—I'll stay. What about—that, sir?" jerking his thumb in the direction of the bowling-green.

"It must remain where it is until the police arrive."

"Won't you be coming back, sir?"

"I'm not quite sure. I may be detained." His tone was very grim. "If I don't return with the police, Neale, I want you to do something for me. It's important, so don't let there be any mistake."

"Not if I can help it, sir," the butler promised.

"A man who will give the name of Morrison will call here to-morrow. He will ask for me—George Amos. I want you to give him a note which I am now going to write."

"I understand, sir—and I promise that Mr. Morrison shall have the note. May I hope, sir, that no harm will come to you?" the man added earnestly.

"I'll do my best to see that it doesn't," was the

ambiguous reply. "I'll write the note while you get out the Ford, Neale."

Ten minutes later the two men parted.

When he was in the car Heath held out his hand.

"Good luck, sir," said Neale.

JERRY SEES ACTION

Sitting on a kitchen-chair in that cold passage, Jerry Hartsgill became profoundly thankful that Destiny had not called him to be either a policeman or a detective. There was too much *waiting* about either job. After he had brought back the news from the seat of war, he should have thought old Ian might have given him a better bit of work than sitting in that confoundedly draughty passage.

There might be a scrap—but again, there might not. The real stuff threatened to be coming off upstairs. Of course, Heath *would* hog the fat part. Wanted to show off before the girl, no doubt—handsome deliverer, and all that bilge.

Well—yawning—he supposed he would have to stick it; he had given his word. And it was entirely through his asking that he had been allowed to come into the show—but he wished something would happen. The only thing he seemed likely to catch in this beastly passage was a perfectly perishing cold.

Time passed—æons, gallons of it; according to Jerry's reckoning. He would have smoked had he not been warned by his superior officer upstairs not to do anything of the kind.

"Smoke, you fool?" Heath had roared; "of course, you can't smoke! Anyone who came sniffing round would smell the tobacco right away—no, my lad, when you do sentry duty under me you do it properly."

A lot of rot, but he supposed he had better keep his pipe in his pocket.

Another eternity of time, or so it seemed to Jerry, and he commenced to nod in his chair. If he had not placed the latter against the wall all might have been well, but as it was he found a resting-place for his head. This was the primrose path to perdition—and quite soon Jerry slept. . . . It is a lamentable confession to have to make concerning one who had professed so much zeal for a life of action, but it should be remembered that the somnolent sentry had had no rest for over forty-eight hours. The duty to which he had been detailed was frightfully dull, anyhow . . . and Jerry Hartsgill slept.

He awoke with a start.

"And I dozed off," he said, in bitter self-reproach. "Good Lord! I slept!" His conscience stabbed him mercilessly.

Shaking himself like a dog who had been rudely roused from a comfortable position by the fireside, he lurched towards the door at the end of the passage. He was still rather stupid from sleep, but was surprised to find this open. It was the middle of the night; and he remembered that Heath had locked this very door before going upstairs.

There was another door on the right. This, he understood, was the private sitting-room of the Neales. Through the fanlight at the top a light showed. He remembered Neale quite well. He was the butler of this curious establishment; a shifty looking cove with a hang-dog look. Was he still up? He tapped on the door, but received no reply.

Jerry decided to go out; there must be some reason why that back door was open.

Like many heavily-built men, Jerry could move

lightly. Also, constant exercise and a country life had kept him fit in spite of his girth.

But where Nature failed Jerry was in the matter of his vision. Directly he got outside the house (after closing and locking the back door behind him; he switched the key from the inside to the outside for the purpose, before dropping it for safety into his pocket) he found himself hopelessly handicapped. A thick night mist clouded his glasses, and it was like trying to find a way through a dense fog. He was practically a blind man traversing unknown country.

He was guided by the noise of scrunched gravel beneath his feet, and he followed the path round until he saw ahead, dimly outlined, a motor-car with the headlights still burning.

This was a definite clue, and he was about to make an examination when from near by came the sound of whispering voices.

Hurriedly he drew back, crouching in the bushes which grew beside the path. There he waited breathlessly.

From the blackness in front came another tense whisper. He could not catch the words, but he knew the language to be German. His friends of the house with the green shutters? He hoped so. There was a settlement due between them. Had Heath heard anything? In any case, he would rush back to the house directly the voices died away.

But, on the other hand, he dared not let these men get away. They had come to Doone Hall that night for a definite purpose; he must find out what it was. Heath would want to know.

Jerry started to wriggle forward on his stomach through the rank undergrowth into which he had crouched. It was slow work and mightily unpleasant. He had managed a dozen feet, perhaps, when his heart

commenced thumping. There was someone—or something near him. . . .

He was now too nervous to move. Some subconscious, primitive sense told him that the Presence hovering near was evil. He could not tell what it was—whether man or animal—but he knew he was being watched.

The fear which had suddenly stricken him infuriated his sense of manhood. Blazes! he wasn't going to funk! He started forward . . . and, in that instant, the menace of the unseen materialised. He was hit a violent blow from a shape that showed up a yet blacker shade than the murk of the night, and then he was smashed to the damp earth; and, before he could put up any effective struggle, consciousness had been knocked out of him. His enemy had been terribly effective.

Slowly awaking to consciousness, Jerry found his arms and legs tied by strong cord to a chair. His body ached intolerably, and his poor head. . . .

"Welcome to our unpretentious abode!"

Jerry looked up to see the man Voyce standing just inside the door. His senses now becoming more alert, he recognised his surroundings. It was the room into which he had looked when in the house with the green shutters.

Voyce stood watching as though reading the other's thoughts.

"Yes, you poor fool! The same room—but you are here under different circumstances. Two nights ago you had the audacity to attempt to spy upon me—you, in your clumsy, elephantine manner, became the attempted snatcher of secrets. But you left your traces—see, my friend, here is your filthy pipe, with the initials 'G. H.' stamped on the band, which you left in the car!"

Jerry could not see very well, for in the scrimmage in the grounds of Doone Hall he had had one lens of his glasses smashed. But he knew that what Voyce was saying was the truth, because he had missed his favourite briar. Yet it had not occurred to him before how he could have lost it. So it had dropped from his pocket whilst he had been hiding in Voyce's car. Bad luck!

"You were trying to help that equally stupid friend of yours. Ian Heath, I suppose? What is his latest rôle? Has he changed as quickly from George Amos, gardener, as he did from Ronald Gavin, coal-merchant? It may interest you to know, my friend, that I have watched your separate and joint gambols with considerable enjoyment. You yourself are naturally a fool, and your associate, in whom you have so much belief, is only one grade above you in intelligence. It has been the very poorest of sport, although amusing."

"At least we've discovered who you really are."

Provoked beyond measure by the scorn-laden taunts, Hartsgill had replied. Yet his voice was measured. This man was an enemy of his country, and he had to maintain his dignity.

The words had a nonplussing effect. Evidently they surprised the other. He had not counted on this. He soon recovered, however, but his tone was more venomous.

"And what do you think you will gain by knowing that?" he asked.

"You will be handed over to the authorities—and England will be rid of a filthy swine!"

Voyce came closer. His eyes were like a snake's.

"So," he retorted—and spat in his captive's face. "You would call me a filthy swine, I, a high-born. . . ." His voice died away; it was as though the words he wanted to utter were choking him.

"For that you shall die," he said, after a pause. "You do not know Gusta Straube; she will teach you so many things that you will imagine a separate hell has been reserved for you. And your friends—Cicely Garrett, Ian Heath—they shall be there to watch. . . . I promise that!"

The blood in his veins was running cold, but Jerry fought back the sickening fear.

"Long before you get hold of Miss Garrett or Ian Heath you will be in Dartmoor. You fool, don't you realise that a net is being set round this house even while we are talking here? What do you imagine I did after leaving the other night? Do you think the police are such fools as to let a crowd like you and your beastly gang escape?" Sheer bluff, but the words gave the speaker a certain consolation.

Voyce considered for a moment. Then he answered:

"You are trying to bluff me, Hartsgill," he said, "and you are doing it very badly. You are no actor; you are just a buffoon. You did not go to the police. I will tell you why: Your friend Heath is in the Secret Service. A man in that Service acts on his own. He considers it beneath his dignity to work with the police. So you did not take your information to that so stupid Inspector Dann; you went with it instead to Heath—who before long will also be in my hands."

Hartsgill remained silent. This man seemed able to read his thoughts long before they were uttered.

"And even had you gone to the police, what could you have told them? Nothing! I have left no trace of my work. I have lived quietly in a cottage on Dartmoor, and am known and respected as a student of nature. Because you have heard me speak in German——"

"Your native tongue!"

"—is that any reason why I should come under the notice of your stupid police? Nothing can be traced

to me, my friend; the war has been over for many years; our countries are friendly."

Jerry Hartsgill strained at his bonds.

"You sloppy ass!" he cried; "you haven't been so clever—Heath has found your secret."

He was exasperated at the truth of what Voyce had said. After all, even Heath had no definite evidence against the man. Voyce could laugh at them. It was in a mood of schoolboyish pique that he had flung the answering challenge—but, like the rest, it was merely bluff.

Yet the words had their effect upon Voyce.

"Heath has discovered my secret, *hein?*" he replied. "Then he will be able to tell my friends in Berlin when we get there, and they will enjoy the joke."

"Take Heath to Berlin! How are you going to manage that?" asked Hartsgill, challenging again.

But the man would not be drawn a second time.

"I must keep that information exclusively for your companion," he replied.

THROUGH THE DARKNESS

Heath's mind was in a whirl when he started from Doone Hall in the antiquated Ford. But one fact was more clearly outlined than any other: he must find the house in Tavistock. The description Jerry had given of the place was necessarily vague, but it should not be difficult in a small town like Tavistock to be directed to the house. The police would certainly know.

He kept thinking of Cicely. It was impossible to banish her from his mind. There could be no doubt that the girl had been taken away from the Hall by force. And the kidnapper must have been Voyce or a member of his crowd—perhaps Gusta Straube herself.

It had been a daring move, but the very audacity of it persuaded him that the German woman had been the engineer.

That night's events were puzzling, but he tried to reason a way through the maze. He did not think that Voyce had intended to kill Warren Murdoch. His exact words to Gusta Straube, according to Jerry, had been: "Murdoch will be attended to." That was certainly a threat, but not necessarily a murderous threat. The original plan was probably just to get possession of Murdoch—the mysteriousness of the means employed, no doubt, appealed to Voyce's twisted mind.

But a wrong man had gone into the grounds. Voyce had early discovered his mistake, and through sheer viciousness, fear, or chagrin (or perhaps a combination of all three) had done a second killing.

Gusta Straube must have accompanied Voyce—perhaps she drove the car which brought him—and when she learned what had happened she must have decided on the bold move which had proved so successful. Defeat must be turned into victory. That was the run of events so far as he could imagine them.

Cicely in that she-devil's power . . . ! Although the night was bitterly cold, perspiration commenced to trickle down his forehead.

He coaxed the ancient engine, but increase of speed was impossible. Instead, out of the murk ahead came disaster.

Even if he had not been so preoccupied there would have been some excuse for the driver of the dilapidated Ford. The track—it could scarcely be called a road—was abominable, and the great car, with the blinding headlights, came tearing round the corner at a prodigious speed.

Too late Heath tried to swerve out of this Juggernaut's destroying path; there was a crash, a chaos of

tearing, rending discords—and the driver of the Ford lay stretched by the side of the ditch.

The man, with the sticking-plaster covering most of his forehead, sat bold upright. He was amazed to find himself in bed. In bed . . . and then, like a sword-thrust through the brain, memory returned.

Heath beckoned to a neatly-capped nurse. She crossed to his bed; her smile displaying white, even teeth.

"How are you feeling?" she asked charmingly.

"I feel I could eat a raw elephant," she was told; "but—excuse me being such a fool—where am I?"

"The Cottage Hospital, Tavistock. You had a motor accident—but I don't suppose you remember?"

"I remember a great brute of a car tearing down on my meek, inefficient little Ford . . . but, well, no—after that there's a pretty big blank. Do fill it in."

Nurse Myrtle Holliday smiled. Life was pretty dull at the Cottage Hospital, and interesting cases, such as were represented by quite good-looking young men with glinting, dare-devil eyes, were rare.

"It was fortunate you weren't killed—a miracle, Dr. Ross says. But for being thrown clean out of your seat, you might have been. You will now do splendidly after being here for a day or two."

The patient put a hand up to his head, which was throbbing like an overwrought piston-engine.

"I say," he pleaded, "you've been so jolly kind, would you mind doing me another favour?"

Nurse Holliday intimated by a second smile, which showed a couple of quite nice dimples in her softly glowing cheeks, that she was more than willing.

"Of course." Adding gently: "You are my patient."

"Well, if you really wouldn't mind, I should like you to see this Dr. Ross and say that I want to have

a word with him. By the way, what is the time?"

"Six o'clock."

"In the morning?"

"No, silly—at night. Can't you see the lights are on?"

"Oh yes." He tried to make his reply seem indifferent, but inwardly cursed. "And now about Dr. Ross—do you mind?"

"Oh, certainly." Nurse Holliday would much rather have stayed talking, and her expression underwent a slight change.

Fifteen hours wasted!

Heath groaned afresh. Was there ever such filthy luck? Fifteen hours gone . . . with Voyce having the laugh of him. . . .

A slightly built man, wearing a surgeon's white coat, entered the ward.

"You wished to see me?"

"I want my clothes," replied the patient.

Dr. Ross smiled, but shook his head.

"Not yet, my friend," he said; "you must stay with us a little while longer. You have had an exceedingly narrow escape, let me tell you, and you are not in a fit state to get up. When the owner of the car which crashed into your Ford brought you here in the early hours of this morning, we didn't like the look of you at all. Do you know you have been unconscious for nearly fifteen hours?"

"Now listen, doctor," answered the patient, while the eyes of the watching nurse grew wider and wider, "I must not only get up, but I must leave here immediately. Don't think my brain has been affected—I tell you it's a matter of the utmost importance."

"But——"

"Please come closer—excuse me, nurse," said the patient, disregarding the interpolation.

What was then whispered into the house-surgeon's ear caused the medico to stare.

"Well . . . well . . ." he muttered, and then again: "Well. . . . "

"I have warned you, doctor," persisted the patient.

Nurse Holliday, now open-mouthed with surprise, watched Dr. Ross go stalking away.

"He has gone to fetch my clothes—and a drink," vouchsafed the patient.

Five minutes later, Ian Heath could have been seen getting dressed. There was a glass containing a reddish-coloured fluid by the side of the bed, and this he drained at a gulp.

"By Jove, doctor, you'd make your fortune as a cocktail-mixer," he declared.

Dr. Ross took off his eye-glasses and polished them.

"Well . . . well!" he muttered.

Ten minutes later, Heath was out of the place.

Nurse Holliday could not restrain her curiosity.

"What was it he whispered to you, doctor?" she asked breathlessly.

"He said that he was a detective on the track of a murderer and that if I detained him it would be at my own peril," the house-surgeon replied.

"Oh, gracious!" thrilled Nurse Holiday; "I knew there was something romantic about him. Did you notice his lovely eyes?"

The pick-me-up which Heath had ordered the doctor to give him had worked wonders, but it had not cleared his head. Although he, himself, did not realise the fact, only a portion of Heath's brain was working. He was able to think of one thing, and one thing only. His mind was concentrated upon a single object:

Voyce. . . .

Everything else had slipped away. Voyce!—Voyce!

—Voyce! That was the solitary and oppressing burden of his thoughts; he was not able to give a moment's consideration to anything else.

He had to get to Voyce. Once he came to grips with the man his task would be done.

He had left the car, borrowed from a Tavistock garage, several hundred yards away, and had crept forward bent almost double. It would be fatal for Voyce to see him. Night had come, but the light was still fairly good.

Although two hours had passed since his departure from the hospital, the obsession remained. He could still think of only one thing: Voyce! Both Cicely and Jerry Hartsgill had faded from his memory.

Voyce!

There was a light in the cottage, and the blood surged through his veins at the sight. Taking cover behind the rough garden-wall, he watched.

He would have to surprise the man—there must be no question of his escape—and to do this it would be necessary to spring on him unawares. How could he get into the cottage with absolute secrecy?

He was debating the point when the door—of which he had a clear view—opened. A man's figure was outlined against the light shed by the lamp from the cottage. Heath's hair stiffened like the hackles of a dog about to fight as he recognised Philip Voyce.

For the space of perhaps half a minute he watched, as the man stood looking to the right and left. Whom was he expecting? If Heath had possessed a revolver he could have killed the man. But he was glad he hadn't a weapon; he wanted to get his hands on him. Nothing else could be so satisfying.

After another quick survey, Voyce turned back into the cottage. A couple of minutes later the light went out. What was due to happen?

Through the stillness came a clicking sound. A dark blob showed again. Voyce had closed the cottage door, and was standing again on the threshold. He seemed to be going on a journey. Where?

Stealing round the corner, still hidden by the wall, Heath was in time to see his quarry walking off across country. He was not heading towards Tavistock, but seemed bent on penetrating into the trackless wastes leading to the heart of the Moor. Curious!

Voyce was walking quickly, giving the idea that he had a definite object in view, but Heath had no difficulty in keeping him in sight. He had done this type of tracking too often in the past not to be a fairly good hand at it. Besides, it was rough country and the many tors offered shelter from time to time.

The man in front seemed too intent on gaining his objective to have any suspicion that he was being followed, and he never once looked back.

Half a mile, perhaps, had been covered when Voyce suddenly disappeared. Risking discovery by rushing forward, Heath through the gloom saw the other at the bottom of a short but steep hill. Swerving to the right, he broke into a loping run. Yet when he got to the bottom, Voyce had completely vanished. There was no trace of him. It was as though the earth had opened.

Heath dropped to the ground. Standing, he realised he was a conspicuous object even in that uncertain light. Voyce might have had an idea he was being followed. . . .

Peering through the gloom, he was able to see ahead a large semicircle of what looked like perfectly even ground. This stretched for some hundreds of yards. Then where could Voyce have gone?

He turned at an indistinguishable sound. At his back—the reason he had not seen it before—was a

huge cleft in the hill he had just descended. He had been on the Moor long enough to reason out what this was—the mouth of a cave. But, judging by the width of the opening—thirty feet or so—it must be the father of all the caves in Dartmoor.

Was this where Voyce had vanished?

As he speculated, Heath saw a light flash in that black maw, and knew that his guess was correct.

He started to wriggle towards the cave mouth. Here, in this primitive setting, he would have the settlement with his enemy.

He gained the place without mishap, wormed his way through into the dappled darkness, and then did a very foolish thing.

"Voyce," he called, "I've come for you!"

FORCED EVIDENCE

BACK at the house with green shutters, Cicely caught her breath as she looked at the man. Through the mists of wonderment, the evil which had overtaken her was assuming a definite shape. Here was the man who had attacked her outside the St. John's Theatre that night—how long ago it seemed!

"At a certain risk to myself, Miss Garrett, I have come to offer you some good counsel." The manner was courteous, his tone seemed genuine. At one time he must certainly have been a gentleman.

"Get me away from here—from that terrible woman!" she pleaded. So far was her nerve broken by what had gone before that she stretched out her hands to him.

"Alas!" He shook his head. "I cannot do that, Miss Garrett. I should suffer, and, believe me, I have suffered enough."

"Then you are afraid—you, a man!" The contempt which would have seared the average person merely caused Victor Von Kroon to shake his head again.

"Yes, I am afraid," he replied; "who wouldn't be?" and bit his lip like one who reviews the past in all its bitterness. There was an air of shabby dignity about the speaker, the dignity of a man whom Fate and his own weaknesses had battered into a state of pitiable resignation.

"What is to happen to me?" she asked after a pause.

"That is what I want to advise you about," he replied. "Something—how can I say it?—very terrible is certain to happen to you unless you are reasonable."

"And what is your idea of being 'reasonable'?" she inquired.

He came a little closer.

"It is not my idea—it is Fraulein Gusta Straube's. She it is who has to decide. She desires possession of the invention which your uncle has made, Miss Garrett."

"It does not belong to me," she replied.

He smiled wearily.

"Believe me, Miss Garrett, such tactics will not avail you anything in dealing with Gusta Straube. I warn you most seriously not to try to thwart her."

Cicely regained something of her courage. This man had elicited her mild pity before, but now, in spite of his evident earnestness, he appeared contemptible. How differently Ian Heath would have borne himself. . . .

The very thought of Heath gave her strength. If she had faith, he would still be able to give her help. She must be brave until that time. When he found her gone from the house, he must come to the inevitable conclusion that she had been taken away by force. He would

lose no time in following her up: she must keep her courage until then.

"Thank you for your suggestion, but, coming from a coward, I am afraid I cannot value it." She threw the words at the man, who, biting his lip, withdrew to the door.

"Presently you will have occasion to recall that I advised you for your good," was his comment.

How the hours passed in that damp-ridden room she could never recall; it seemed a purgatory without end. Perhaps this waiting was merely a ruse to tax her nerve and to break down what remained of her strength —either that, or the enemy were completing some other plans before dealing with her.

The most racking part was the knowledge that Heath had not come. This was prostrating. Perhaps she expected too much, but . . . oh, to have seen his face, to have heard his voice! No doubt he had done his best after consoling her uncle, and, of course, he could not tell where she had been taken, but . . . All through the infinitely wearying hours she tried to reason with herself, but was unsuccessful.

Daylight faded and darkness came again. The door opened and the woman she hated entered the room. Gusta Straube ignored her until she had set a match to the fire in the grate, and watched the sticks begin to crackle and the flames shoot high up the wide chimney.

Then, crossing to where she sat still bound with ropes, the woman blared:

"Do you still refuse to tell us where the invention is hidden?"

Gusta Straube glowered evilly, but Cicely, summoning all her remaining resolution, stared her back.

"Yes—I refuse," she said.

Straube raised a hand and slapped the helpless girl on the cheek.

"You white-faced English doll——"

"You're wrong there," replied Cicely; "I'm not English—I'm American."

The lips of the German woman drew back in a yet more vicious snarl.

"Then I hate you more than ever. Listen! If you persist in your obstinacy, do you know what I will do?" She drew closer to the girl who was bound hand and foot, and whispered gloatingly: "I will take your shoes and stockings off and I will put a red hot iron to the soles of your feet. *That* will make you talk!"

Cicely felt a deadly nausea overtaking her.

"I have tried it with many people—and it has never failed. Now make your choice!"

A fog came before Cicely's eyes; her head swam; the feeling of nausea increased. The flames only a few feet away warmed her face. . . . She saw Gusta Straube stoop. The woman picked up a poker which she thrust fiercely into the heart of the fire. . . .

"The invention belongs to my uncle." She had to speak; the words lent her a sort of spurious courage.

Gusta Straube turned. Her heavy face was repulsive.

"And soon it shall belong to me—and Germany!" she gloated. "Quickly, my little American—the truth from your mouth, or the poker to your bare feet? It is for you to decide."

Cicely remained silent. She was praying for strength. Even when the German woman tore off her shoes and stockings, she did not speak. Straube could kill her first.

"This is your last chance—is the invention in your uncle's laboratory? I have a feeling that he has removed it to a safer place. Am I correct?"

Silence.

"*Ach!* Very well."

The woman's features were animated by a febrile excitement. She rushed to the fire and withdrew the poker which was white hot at the end.

Cicely shrank in her bonds, horror-stricken. *The woman meant to do it. . . .*

"Now I think you will speak——"

As Cicely screamed the door was flung open. Two men burst in.

"What the devil—? I won't stand for that!"

The speaker was the man with the scarred face. By his side was Philip Voyce. The latter stepped forward and stood by the girl.

"No, Gusta—*that* won't do at all. The only result you would get would be for Miss Garrett to faint. There is a far better way. But first let me have a few words with the young lady."

Although he had saved her from a terrible fate, Cicely loathed the man as he stood looking down at her.

"My dear Miss Garrett," he said, "to-night I intend to take you away from Devonshire. You will accompany my friend and myself to Germany. Before we make a start on that journey, it is necessary, however, that you should inform us where the invention on which your uncle has been working so long, and, I believe, so successfully, can be found. Since you have evidenced a reluctance to supply this information, I now propose to send you into an hypnotic state. Then your will, controlled by mine, will gratify all our wishes. You must forgive my dear colleague; her enthusiasm is sometimes allowed to overrun her discretion." The speaker turned to smile at Gusta Straube, who poured forth a flood of German invective.

"Now, my dear Cicely—" Philip Voyce had seated

himself upon a chair and was staring fixedly at her eyes.

She struggled to fight off the fresh weakness that attacked her. If she could only stop looking into his face . . . but she couldn't. Quickly an inertia of mind and body sapped her strength; she was barely conscious of moaning, and then remembered nothing else.

"You see, Gusta, how much more efficacious my method is," Voyce remarked, smiling in triumph.

The woman choked.

"Remember, both of you, that I shall never forget this!" She glared longest at Von Kroon who, now that his mood had sobered, backed away.

"Tut! Tut! Gusta," remarked Voyce; "don't let us quarrel. Soon we shall be over the sea——"

She swung round on the speaker.

"Get on with your work. It is time we were off. So long as that man Heath—" She did not finish, but snapped her fingers impatiently.

Voyce, smiling ironically, went to his task. Facing the unconscious girl, he said slowly and impressively: "You are enchained by my will, and you will answer all the questions I put to you. Speak!"

From the lips of the girl came the low but unhesitating reply:

"I will answer all the questions you put to me."

"First, then: Where is the invention?"

There was no delay in the reply. It followed immediately upon the question.

"It is in a secret hiding-place on the top of the landing at Doone Hall."

"Who put it there?"

"My uncle."

"Were you with him at the time?"

"Yes."

"Why did he remove it from the laboratory?"

"He wished to place it where no one could find it."

"You know exactly where it is?"

"Yes."

Voyce stopped to wipe his forehead. He was pale.

"Good!" ejaculated Gusta Straube. "There is one thing more—get her to say where Heath is."

Voyce held up his hand.

"You over-estimate my powers, my dear Gusta. Furthermore, the science of hypnotic suggestion has its limits; my control over the girl will not elicit from her information of which she has no direct or personal knowledge. It is only things in which she has taken a part, or seen or heard, of which she can be made to speak."

The woman made an impatient exclamation.

"Nevertheless, I myself can satisfy your curiosity, my dear Gusta. During the day, while you have been so busy going through your reports and settling up affairs generally, I have wandered through the streets of this pleasant little Devonshire town—which, I confess, I shall be reluctant to leave—making various inquiries. These were necessary, I think, in view of the possible calling of the police to this house."

"Why should they come here?"

"Don't forget that the man Hartsgill paid a surreptitious visit, and that he is certain to have passed on his information—such as it was—to Heath."

"Isn't that the very reason why I want to know where Heath is at the present time? In his conceit he has preferred to work on his own until now, but he has probably sent for assistance by this time. Have you found out anything about Heath?" the woman repeated fiercely. "That is what I want to know."

"I have," said Philip Voyce suavely. "He met with a motor accident outside Tavistock at 3:30 this morn-

ing, was stunned, and is still lying senseless at the local Cottage Hospital."

"Will he die?" asked Gusta Straube.

"It is not likely. But when I called an hour ago he was still unconscious."

"Why was he coming to Tavistock?"

"I presume that he was going to the police with the intention of ascertaining exactly where this house was situated—if he had not already been told by the man Hartsgill."

"And he didn't see the police?"

"I should think it extremely unlikely in view of the smash. Consequently, since Doone Hall is not fitted with the telephone, I presume that the faithful Neale is still in charge—and that apart from Murdoch there is no one else there. Which is quite satisfactory from our point of view, Gusta."

"Yes. Now, listen," she said after a moment's reflection. "It is essential that we should get away to-night, and as quickly as possible. Can you keep the girl in a state of 'control' which will make her do exactly what I ask—even in the presence of other people?"

"I can," replied Voyce.

"Then I will take her to Doone Hall and get the invention."

"It is a tremendous risk," commented Von Kroon.

The woman snapped her thick fingers again.

"It is a risk which you will share, because you are to accompany me," she replied sneeringly. She turned to Voyce. "I have informed Von Habenfeld we are crossing to-night—there must be no hitch."

"There won't be any," was the confident answer.

"I maintain there is a great risk," repeated Von Kroon.

Straube turned on him viciously.

"You fool! I shall drive up with the girl. I shall have a loaded revolver in my bag, you understand. The girl will be told what to say. I shall be on one side of her, and you, Kroon, on the other. When the butler appears, he will be told that we are friends of hers.

"Now, then," she continued; "We three are in the Hall. There is only Neale and his wife there——"

"One minute!" The interruption came from Von Kroon. "What about the inventor himself?"

"If he appears, I shall leave him to you. You will be armed and ought to be responsible for two feeble specimens like Murdoch and Neale."

Von Kroon lapsed into silence, and the woman resumed: "Meanwhile, having explained that I found the girl wandering in Tavistock, evidently suffering from loss of memory, I accompany her upstairs. Whilst she gets the invention, I stand over her with a loaded revolver."

"There is just one thing, my dear Gusta," commented Voyce, taking a cigarette from a slim gold case, "when you come away, don't forget to bring the girl with you—I want her."

Whilst the woman smiled with horrible understanding, Von Kroon turned.

"You're an awful swine, really," he muttered.

Voyce, smoking his cigarette with evident relish, ignored the insult and spoke to Straube again.

"It's rather a pity you have decided to leave so soon, Gusta. I should have thought you hated going back without Heath. I confess I do."

The woman flashed her teeth.

"We will deal with Heath in Germany—on our own ground," she replied; "and there"—pointing to the unconscious girl—"is the bait with which we will set the trap."

Voyce puffed at his cigarette.

"Not bad, Gusta—not at all bad," he complimented; "the best of it is that the man is so mad that he will undoubtedly fall for it." He became more serious. "At what time shall I instruct Phapf to be at the—rendezvous?"

Gusta Straube looked at her watch.

"It is now six o'clock," she replied. "We shall get to Doone Hall, if we start soon, by a quarter to seven. That will allow us time to get the girl into a condition fit to travel and able to bear a certain amount of scrutiny. We should not be at the Hall long—say twenty minutes. Allow another—how long should it take us to get to the place?"

"Say three-quarters of an hour: it's rather a rough road."

"Then we should be there by eight o'clock at the latest."

"I will be ready," replied Voyce.

Von Kroon looked at them both.

"Why can't you come to the Hall with us?" he asked. "There may be trouble there—I confess I don't much care for the idea—and you would be useful."

Voyce withered him with a glance.

"I have things to attend to," he said, and, bowing to Gusta, he left the room.

Von Kroon turned to the woman.

"I hate that fellow!" he said between clenched teeth.

Gusta Straube looked at him seriously.

"He is a bad one to hate—I warn you, Kroon."

The man waved a hand impatiently, as though indicating he was not prepared to argue the matter.

"You think I am funking this trip," he said; "it's not that. You have no nerves, Gusta—but to me the thing looks too easy. I am afraid of a trap. How do

we know that this girl spoke the truth when she was under that so-called 'control'?"

"She was obliged to speak the truth."

"So *he* says," motioning backwards over his shoulder savagely; "but how are we to know that it *is* the truth? Oh, well," he concluded, as he noticed the expression strengthening on the woman's face, "it may be that I am wrong."

"Of course you are wrong! If you are afraid, I will go into the place alone! Enough! We start in twenty minutes."

SIR HARKER BELLAMY CHIPS IN

Andrew Morrison ("No. 39" in that particular branch of the Secret Service which Sir Harker Bellamy controlled) stared at the speaker.

"You intend to come, Chief?" he expostulated.

"Why not?" replied the grim, grey man. "Although he has not favoured me with any communications since he has been away—a matter concerning which I shall be forced to talk to him rather severely—I gather that our friend Heath has stumbled across something peculiarly interesting whilst on this holiday. Isn't that so?"

No. 39 smiled in the baffling manner for which he was celebrated.

"All I know, sir, is that a short time ago I had a note from Heath (we have worked together on several jobs, as you know), asking me to keep a sharp look-out in Town for an aristocratic-looking cove, somewhat run to seed, whose right cheek was decorated by a sabre slash."

Sir Harker Bellamy pulled at his cigar until both men were enveloped in smoke.

"H'm, yes," he commented; "and did you find time to do so?"

"Yes, Chief. I ran the gentleman in question to earth at the One O'Clock."

The other evinced added interest.

"You mean that pest-house near Tottenham Court Road?"

"That's the show, Chief. I really must take you along there one night; it's worth seeing. . . ." The speaker chuckled silently at some memory which he did not divulge, and then sprang a surprise sufficient to make Bellamy jump from his chair.

"As I was saying, I saw this fellow at the One O'Clock. Inquiries drew forth the fact that his name was Von Kroon and that he had worked for Berlin."

"And still does, no doubt. Who was he with?"

Then came the surprise.

"Gusta Straube," replied No. 39, stepping back to watch how the other took the information.

Sir Harker Bellamy certainly showed signs of excessive excitement.

"Gusta Straube!" he roared; "the most dangerous woman we have against us! She was in London, you say, and you didn't tell me!"

Morrison coughed apologetically.

"I was asked by Heath to keep this little affair strictly under my hat. He was supposed to be on holiday——"

"He's been 'supposing' a good many things—being a corpse one of them! Where is the woman Straube now?"

No. 39 picked up his hat—rather a neat shade in brown—as though he hoped to steal silently away.

"There is some reason to believe she may be in Devonshire, Chief; I was just on my way to verify."

Bellamy threw away his cigar.

"What train are you catching?" he blared, and when the reply came: "We can get to Paddington in twenty minutes. I'll just have time to pack a bag."

The younger man pursed his lips, and was greeted with a stormy demand:

"Why in the hell are you making those faces?"

"I was only thinking, Chief, that—if I may say so —you are not so young as you once were, and—well, there may be trouble: you know what the Straube woman is."

"All the more reason why I should be on the spot! That young fool Heath takes the most ridiculous chances!"

No. 39 smiled. He might have replied that the man on the Chief's staff who wasn't prepared to take "ridiculous chances" didn't last long.

"Yes, this is Mr. Morrison and I am the chief of his department!" stated the grizzled-haired, grim-faced man, in answer to the butler's inquiry.

Neale stood aside.

"Very good, sir. There is a note waiting for Mr. Morrison. I had to hand it to him at once."

The two callers followed him into the library.

"May I offer you some refreshment, sir?" the butler asked.

"The note first! Where is the note?" snapped Sir Harker Bellamy.

"Here, sir."

No. 39 tore it open with eager fingers. He read rapidly and then passed it to his superior.

"H'm," commented the latter. "Yes, bring two whiskies and sodas, and then we want to talk with you. What is your name?"

"Neale, sir." The man departed.

"Read out what Heath says," repeated Bellamy, when the door was closed.

The other read:

" 'DEAR MORRISON,

" 'Hell's popping in this house—and there's lots more to come. Have had to push off in the middle of the night to Tavistock. Wait until I send for you—it's the best I can think of at the moment. Neale will see to you—trust him.

" 'I. H.' "

"Heath must have been pretty well up against things to have dashed off an incoherent note like that," commented the reader when he had come to an end.

The other grunted.

"The butler will be able to tell us something."

It took Neale nearly half an hour to narrate his story. Not once did either listener interrupt.

"It amounts to this, then," said Bellamy at the end: "Two men have died, your mistress has been kidnapped, and the police have not arrived?"

"Mr. Heath started out at three o'clock this morning, sir, to communicate with the police at Tavistock."

"Yes—you have already explained that. Very well, Neale."

When they were alone again, No. 39 seized his superior's arm.

"Something's happened to Heath, Chief! Can't you see that? He would have been back long before this. He started out at three o'clock this morning, and now it's nearly seven—sixteen hours! Straube's got hold of him!"

Bellamy frowned.

"You will have to get into Tavistock as quickly as possible, Morrison——"

"There's no car, Chief!"

"And no telephone."

Bellamy cursed with remarkable fluency for several moments. Then he rang the bell.

"Neale," he said to the butler, "I want to know if a coarse-faced, foreign-looking woman—as a matter of fact, she's a German—wearing a monocle, has ever called here?"

Neale reflected. "I have never seen such a woman, sir."

Bellamy resumed his heated language.

THE FIGHT

THERE was a second of perfect silence after Heath has spoken his challenge. Then the light snapped out and there was darkness.

After that a voice, pleasant enough to hear:

"Who's that? Come in, there's a good fellow."

"It's Heath—and I'm waiting for you here." Who knew what infernal trap there might not be at the back of that cave? His determination to kill the man had increased, but now that the moment of contact had come, a coolness took the place of his former frenzy.

Again silence.

This was followed by: "Heath, you say? And who in the devil is Heath? What do you want, anyway?"

Heath did not speak. He guessed the trick: the other had a gun, and Voyce wanted direction so that he might kill with the first shot. He changed his position quickly—just before the stillness was shattered by a revolver firing.

Again silence. Then a groan. It came from the lips of Heath. He wished to draw his foe.

He heard a creeping, shuffling sound. Voyce, thinking he had killed or mortally wounded, was coming to ascertain. As he moved forward, Heath, judging by distance, crept round to take him from the back.

But just as he was about to thrust his hands forward, his quarry suddenly turned. In a tense silence the two got to grips.

There was a snapped oath, a slight thud—and the odds were even; the revolver Voyce had been holding was on the floor of the cave. Man to man now, with nothing but their bare hands to help them.

In spite of his consuming hate, Heath fought in the British way. He endeavoured to knock his foe out with blows from his clenched firsts. Voyce fought as a trapped animal will fight; he recognised no rules. His bared teeth showed that he would even bite if he got the chance. Gone with the suavity, the gentle manner; with his wig he had lost his superficiality. He was now sheer brute.

He had many factors urging him on; among them the knowledge that only this man stood between him and a tremendous triumph. When he returned to Berlin he would be acclaimed. The great Von Habenfeld would congratulate him personally. And he would also have the girl—to do what he liked with. . . .

Only this man, the hated enemy, to overcome! All the brooding spite, the gnawing jealousy, the natural antipathy he had borne to Ian Heath since the first night they had met, went into his strength.

But the Englishman was strong—strong and cool. The greyish-blue eyes remained calm—but the calmness was of ice. This man was inflexible; he would fight till the end; he would never give in. Voyce, knowing this, redoubled his efforts.

But a shrewdly aimed blow sent him staggering

back as he leapt for the throat, and now they started to circle round each other like a pair of warring dogs. Apart from their clothes, they might have been duplicating a scene of thousands of years before; when this great cave had undoubtedly been occupied by Neolithic man who lived densely on the Moor at that time. Men fought for a woman and their personal hate even then. . . .

Heath spoke.

"Come and fight," he taunted, and then braced himself to meet the shock.

Voyce, scowling, answered the challenge. In spite of the risk which he knew lay at the back of failure, he had to kill the other. So urgent was this desire that every other feeling was blotted out; he was obsessed, saturated by it.

Heath was able to get only one short-arm jab home before he felt Voyce's arms about him. The touch of the enemy flesh awoke an added savagery. He forgot his original campaign; he was content to become as unbridled as the other.

"You English swine!" choked his foe, groping for a better hold.

Heath saved his breath. He knew he would want it all; he must reserve his powers. His head was throbbing as though a devilish machine was inside it. The pain was maddening.

He tried to get a ju-jitsu grip on the other, but Voyce was too wily. And the man had far greater strength than he had expected; he was battling as though hate had sent him mad.

Heath slipped from that fierce embrace, but Voyce sprang again. His eyes were like a famished wolf's; there were specks of foam upon his lips; from his throat came short incoherent cries. . . .

Heath gasped. The man's arms were fastened round

his chest again. Voyce thrust his face forward; the naked skull, from which the wig had long since slipped, gleamed livid . . . a sickening sight.

It was this sense of disgust which enabled Heath to tear himself free. The blood was racing like a torrent through his veins; there was a mist before his eyes.

"Filth!" he snarled. Something had snapped inside him. The culture of the ages had fallen away. He was as primitive as his forbears who had made that cave their dwelling-place. He no longer wanted to knock Voyce senseless; he had to get Voyce's throat between his fingers. Then, and only then, would he be able to satisfy the instinct to kill.

They were tight-locked again, legs entwined, arms weaving, hands twisting, losing grip and gaining it once more. Their breathing came gaspingly from tortured lungs. But neither felt any weakness; hate called every drop of blood, every stiffened fibre, ever ounce of energy to the fight.

Now Heath had the other's throat. A twist and his hands slipped upwards. He had the insane idea to rend apart the mouth which had uttered so many lies, which had smiled with such damnable falsity. That mouth would never kiss Cicely—he would tear it to shreds first. . . .

A sudden numbing pain which turned his vitals sick —Voyce had rammed his knee into him foully—made him lose hold. He slipped. . . .

"You want to know who killed Sapford and the other? I killed them—as I shall kill you. Your throat will be torn open like theirs——"

His teeth snapping, Voyce made his confession.

And again: "You came here to save the girl! Fool! She goes with me to Berlin to-night! You intended her for your wife—she is to be my plaything! *Ach!*" He

must have imagined that the end was near, for the body in his arms had weakened.

He paused momentarily to watch the effect of his gloating on his foe.

In that lay his undoing. Suddenly he felt Heath quiver and then stiffen. Then came a mighty heave—and the advantage had passed to his enemy. A whirlwind attacked him in turn; relentless fingers gripped his throat, and this time they clung; it was impossible to shake them off. It was impossible, also, to fling himself clear of the man who fought with silent yet terrible tenacity. He had miscalculated fatally; the other had been resting, bracing himself for the final effort, which he intended to be triumphant. And the mention of the girl had increased his resolve tenfold. . . .

A million devils, he was going to win! This cursed English dog. . . . But the English always won. . . .

He was choking . . . the man's hands were squeezing the precious life out of him. . . . What would Gusta say? . . . *Ach! Gott in Himmel.* . . .

Scarcely sane, Ian Heath flung the limp man away from him so powerfully that Voyce, striking the side of the cave with tremendous force, crumpled into a heap and lay still.

Heath collapsed himself, sagging to the ground where he had stood. He had won, but he would have been powerless to lift a finger if anyone else should have come. For at least five minutes he remained perfectly still whilst his labouring lungs and overtaxed heart threatened to burst with the strain he had put upon them.

But gradually relief came. He stood up, swaying slightly, and crossed to where Voyce sprawled inert.

"Get up!" he ordered.

There was no reply.

It was not until he made a close examination that

Heath discovered the man was dead. In falling he had broken his neck.

He had fulfilled his main object, but there was still much to be done. The secret of the cave had to be discovered.

Flashing the torch which Voyce had used, he had only walked forward a few yards before he stopped in wonderment.

"Why didn't I think of that before?" he asked.

THE BARRED WINDOW

Two hours before Ian Heath had flung his enemy away from him with such force that the man broke his neck, Jerry Hartsgill contrived after much manœuvring to free his hands and feet. He had been treated in the same way as Cicely Garrett—lashed to a chair so that he was scarcely able to move.

His first impulse was to rush to the door, his second, upon finding this locked, to feel in his pockets for the wherewithal to smoke. He wanted a pipe about as badly as he had ever wanted anything in his life.

He met with disappointment. There was a pipe in his pocket, but no tobacco: his pouch had been lost by some means; probably it had gone the way of the right lens of his glasses.

Half blind, aching in every joint, feeling sick and utterly weary, he walked across the room to the window. He was already aware that this was barred—it was the first thing he had noticed after being left alone —but there must be a way out. He simply could not stay there. There was old Ian to be warned: that swine Voyce had spouted something about dragging the old lad over to Berlin, there to do the dirty on him. And

they had the girl, too. . . . Jumping snakes, he must get out! Get out! . . .

Using admirable control considering his mental state, he tried the window cautiously, found it would open, and raised the lower half. But the bars remained, and when he took hold of one he realised that something more than his strength would be required to break down that barrier. Only a dozen feet or so below was the ground—and freedom. Those cursed bars. . . .

It was while he was cudgelling his despairing brains that he noticed a figure standing below. It was nearly dusk, and he had only half his usual sight, but even with his impaired vision there was something vaguely familiar about this man. He had bowed legs, and——

Jerry became rigid. Could some miracle have sent Joe Dorrance, old Ian's landlord, to this place? It seemed too preposterous to be credible; and yet, as he pushed his face against the bars, straining his eyes to get a better view, the man appeared to give some gesture of recognition himself.

There was just a chance of it being Dorrance; and if he wasn't Dorrance he might be an outsider—a man who would respond to an appeal for help. Feeling in his pockets again, he found a piece of paper and a pencil, scribbled a note, wrapped it around his pipe, and then flung it down. He had the satisfaction of seeing the man make the catch before he closed down the window again at the sound of approaching footsteps.

Leaving his brother-in-law cosily ensconced in the corner of the great settle, Dorrance sallied forth. Since his retirement from the Turf, Joe had not taken all the exercise he should have done, but he was certainly going to keep his word to Maria and have a look at the master's old place as promised.

Although it was at least fifteen years since he had been at Tavistock, he had no difficulty in finding his way. Memories of the month he had spent as the guest of that splendid sportsman, Sir Brian Mortenby, were pleasant companions as he nipped along. What a splendid employer Sir Brian had been! So different from too many of the present-day followers of the Turf. The new class sickened him. They scarcely knew one end of a horse from the other, and yet they expected to win every race for which they entered.

To-morrow he must hunt up Ian Heath at that cottage of Mr. Hartsgill's. He hoped the guv'nor was enjoying his holiday. It would be funny having a lodger back who was supposed to be dead: he didn't quite see how Mr. Heath was going to explain his coming to life again, but, there, the guv'nor wasn't one to let a trifle like that worry him.

Happy in his thoughts, Dorrance continued on his way. The afternoon was drawing to a close; soon the street lamps would be lit, curtains would be drawn, fires made up and chairs pushed closer to the cheery flames. After his walk the steak and chips which he had ordered for his return at the Lord Nelson inn would taste delicious.

Soon he had left the main portion of the own behind and had come to a road leading straight to the Moor. The house was on the left . . . yes, here was the old gate opening on to the courtyard.

He stood for a few moments drinking in the familiar scene. In his mind's eye he could see sixteen-stone Sir Brian Mortenby, ruddy-cheeked, jovial, the usual laugh hovering on his well-shaped mouth, come clattering out of that massive entrance astride his favourite bay mare, "Lucy."

"Joe, you young devil . . ." a ghostly voice cried.

The ex-jockey put a hand up. Lord love him, there

were tears in his eyes! Tears! Well, he wasn't ashamed of them. The happiest years of his life were those he had spent with the owner of that mythical voice.

He turned as a country labourer passed on his way home from work.

"Can you tell me who's living here now, mate?" he asked.

The rustic took his time over digesting the remark. Then, without removing the short clay pipe from the corner of his mouth, he replied, "That there place be shut up. Nobody ain't lived there for years," and shuffled on.

Dorrance waited until the man had turned the corner in the road before trying the door. As he expected, it was fastened. But he was cheered rather than depressed by the news he had received. The old house being unoccupied, he would be free to ramble through the place.

With other people likely to pass, he decided that climbing the front wall might be considered suspicious, so he went round to the back. It was a stiffish climb, and he was more than a little puffed when he dropped to the ground on the other side. But when he caught sight of the out-buildings that had once served the purpose of stabling thoroughbreds, he felt more than repaid for the exertion.

As he pushed the first door open he sighed with regret. It was pitiful to see how neglected the once-famous stables had become and how the destroying hand of decay had set in. There was a desolating smell of damp, and cobwebs clustered thickly over everything. And yet it was in this stable, only sixteen years before, that "Cerebus," one of the most famous colts in Turf history, had once fed and slept. Oho! . . .

Lighting a pipe, Joe pondered over the mutability of things. Sixteen years. . . . He had been one of the

people's favourites himself then. . . . His photograph had been printed in the newspapers; he was courted by the aristocracy—even Royalty had smiled. . . .

And now he was forgotten, laid aside, ignored. Apart from a few intimate friends, the world had passed him by. Well, it was the common fate: actresses, jockeys, footballers, cricketers, boxers; they all slipped into forgetfulness after sunning themselves for a few brief hours in popular favour.

Leaving the first stable Joe wandered into the second of the outbuildings. This also had housed thoroughbreds in his time.

"Hullo!" he muttered to himself, a habit of his when surprised. "I thought that chap said the house was shut up."

He stood staring at a couple of motor-cars placed side by side.

Closing the door behind him, he studied his new surroundings. Although he remembered this as a stable, as was the case with the other buildings, some crude attempt had been made to convert it into a garage. There were tins of petrol, spare parts, and other paraphernalia.

"Funny thing, a couple of cars being kept in a deserted house," he muttered; "someone must be living here. Perhaps it's a relative of old Sir Brian."

He walked across to the back door, which he recalled so well, with the intention of making the inquiry of a maid. She would readily understand when he explained that he was once in the employ of Sir Brian Mortenby.

Dorrance never rang that bell. As he stood with his hand outstretched, something attracted his attention at a window up above. Stepping back a pace, he looked up.

"Holy Mike!" he said breathlessly.

A dozen feet or so above him was a window. This was protected by heavy bars.

It was not the window, however, but the face which looked out that caused the ex-jockey to break into his startled exclamation.

For he recognised the face; it was that of Mr. Hartsgill, the guv'nor's friend. What could he be doing there—in a deserted house?

"Mr. Hartsgill!" In spite of the gathering gloom, he knew he was not mistaken: the man above him was the guv'nor's friend all right.

His voice may have penetrated through the window, which he noticed was open six inches or so at the bottom. But what surprised him was seeing the man he addressed put a finger up to his lips in a gesture of caution. The other wanted him to keep quiet. Why?

He had not to wait long for the answer. The figure at the window disappeared, but there had been something so significant in his attitude that Dorrance felt he was expected to wait. Perhaps Mr. Hartsgill was coming down to see him.

He waited a couple of minutes, expecting to hear a step and to see the back door open. But when the man he knew to be the friend of Ian Heath reappeared, his face was at the window again. It showed white in the gloom.

Still Hartsgill did not speak; instead he pushed his hand through the bars and something fell from it. Dorrance caught a small packet.

He had to get away. Following the movement made by the man at the window, he understood that he was wanted to leave—and leave quickly. For the first time since this strange pantomime had started, the ex-jockey began to think that this friend of the guv'nor's was not quite the thing. Either that, or——

He looked up at the window once again. The window was closed and the man had disappeared.

Joe backed into the grounds. It was now practically dark, and he ought to be able to get away without being accosted.

Half an hour later he was grasping the arm of his brother-in-law in a manner which roused the Scotland Yard detective effectually from the sleep into which he had fallen in front of the bar-parlour fire.

"Bill!" he called.

"Whatsermatter?" drowsily demanded his relative.

"Matter enough," retorted the ex-jockey; "there's work for you to do. A pal of my guv'nor's is being murdered!"

The Scotland Yard man rubbed the remainder of the sleep out of his eyes.

"What the hell are you jawing about, Joe?"

"It's the Gospel truth—read this note!" The agitated speaker thrust a grimy piece of paper beneath the other's nose. Detective-Sergeant William Collins' expression changed as he read words evidently hurriedly scribbled——

"Miss Cicely Garrett being tortured and kept prisoner in this house. Send to police—bring help.

"G. HARTSGILL."

"Who's G. Hartsgill?" inquired the detective, "and where did you get this?" flipping the note.

"I can tell you on the way to the police station," replied the former jockey, cramming his hat on his head.

"I want you to tell me now," persisted his brother-in-law; "a more ridiculous story I never heard in my life. I tell you what it is, Joe—that place of your old guv'nor's is being used as a loony asylum, and this

note was written by one of the patients. You said the fellow was in a room that had bars to the window, didn't you?"

The ex-jockey drew himself erect.

"If you don't treat this seriously, Bill, I swear I'll tell Maria—Heath's her particular favourite; she'd never forgive you. I can believe my own eyes, can't I?" he continued. "I tell you I saw this Mr. Hartsgill, who's a close pal of my guv'nor's, as clear as I see you now. You've told me yourself that the guv'nor's in the Secret Service; what's more likely than that he really came down here on a job?—I never did believe in that holiday yarn—and that this Mr. Hartsgill tried to give him a hand, but fell into the soup instead? I'll lay four to one that's right!"

The detective, wide awake now, stretched himself.

"All right, Joe," he replied, "but, mind you, if I'm made a fool of in front of these local coppers, heaven help you—Maria or no Maria!"

At the police station they were received with rough-and-tumble good humour by the local sergeant.

"To begin with, the 'ouse ain't occupied," he remarked. It wasn't every day of the week that a Devon police-sergeant could have the laugh on a real live Scotland Yard detective.

"Well, it's occupied now," asserted Joe Dorrance; "here's proof of it," pointing to the note.

"'Ave yer own way," replied the sergeant; "but who's this Miss Cicely Garrett?"

"I don't know—but she's a friend of Mr. Hartsgill, and that's enough for me."

"It's enough for me too," put in Collins.

After a hostile glance, the police-sergeant prepared for action by taking his hat down from a hook on the wall and bellowing : "Timms!" In answer to the summons, a lanky-figured constable appeared from the

back of the station and looked inquiringly at his superior.

"There's no one living at the old Manor 'Ouse, is there?" inquired the sergeant.

"No, sergeant. Been empty for a long whiles."

In answer to a gesture from his brother-in-law, Detective-Sergeant William Collins touched the interrogator on the arm.

"Come along; we're wasting time," he said.

The party of four had barely turned the corner when Dorrance put up a hand.

"Now will you believe, you fool?" he demanded angrily of the police-sergeant. Without waiting for a reply he broke into a run. Yet he was outstripped by the Scotland Yard man. Behind floundered the two bewildered members of the local constabulary. Police-Sergeant Hagley no longer doubted; the night sky was reflecting a giant blaze—and the building on fire was the old Manor House.

NEALE ANNOUNCES

A MOTOR-CAR drew up outside the entrance to Doone Hall.

"Turn the car around and leave the engine running," ordered Gusta Straube.

"Of course," muttered Victor Von Kroon at the wheel; "I'm not quite a fool." Nevertheless, he was prompt in obeying.

"Suppose the police are here?" he asked when, with Cicely Garrett between them, they walked up the gloomy, neglected drive to the front door.

"The police!" There was an infinitude of contempt in the woman's tone; "a set of fools at the best! And haven't we twelve lives in our two revolvers?"

The answer did not appear to satisfy Von Kroon.

"But the girl may upset everything—she may be bluffing us now," he persisted.

Gusta Straube stopped.

"Once we are back in Berlin, Kroon, you shall receive your release," she said.

The words, innocent-sounding enough, had a terrifying effect upon the man.

"Gusta, you wouldn't—?" he started to plead, but she cut him short.

"Stop whining, you cur," she said fiercely.

Twenty seconds later they were outside the huge front door. Unhesitatingly, Gusta Straube rang the bell.

Neale, as he inclined his head, did some quick thinking. There was something very strange about this visit —and about the visitors. True, they had brought Miss Cicely back, but——

This woman who had placed a monocle into her left eye when he had opened the door. . . . The butler's heart gave a sudden jump; this must be the very woman Sir Harker Bellamy had asked him about. An inspiration came to him.

"No, madam, there is no one at the Hall." He made the briefest of pauses. "The master is out."

The woman lowered her eye-glass.

"Then the explanation I should have made to Mr. Warren Murdoch, this poor child's uncle, I can leave with you. My name is Stansfield—Miss Ruth Stansfield. I am staying for the present at the Bell Hotel, Tavistock, with my cousin, Mr. Robert Whiting," indicating the man accompanying her.

"Yes, madam," encouraged Neale.

"Well, this afternoon, when I was out riding along the Okehampton Road, I noticed a girl in a state of collapse. I stopped at once and spoke to the unfor-

tunate creature. But all I could get was a look of utter blankness. Deciding that the girl had either recently passed through a terrible shock, or had lost her memory by some other cause, I took her back to my hotel and had her medically attended. The doctor—Dr. Lomax it was—certified that she was, indeed, suffering from loss of memory. Later, the police were able to establish her identity, and so I have brought Miss Garrett home. Your mistress must be put to bed at once. If you will show me the way I will attend to her." The woman put her arm protectingly round the girl as she spoke.

"Very good, madam." Neale's speech was innocuously flat, but he was making some rapid calculations.

He did not trust this woman who had been so glib with her speech; he would not have trusted her even if he had not heard Sir Harker Bellamy's previous words. But what worried him even more than the look of blankness on Miss Cicely's face—what had these people done to her?—was the fear that the woman with the monocle might hear men's voices and suddenly take fright. That she and the man with her had come to the Hall for some purpose of their own that night was certain—but why bring Miss Cicely? He could not understand it. And why did the girl remain silent?

"I hope you are feeling a little better, Miss Cicely?" he said, using the conventional tone of the butler.

The girl looked at him, but the blankness stayed in her face.

"Miss Garrett's memory is still seriously impaired, according to Dr. Lomax," quickly interposed the woman. "Now take us to your mistress's room."

Neale looked across the hall. The staircase was hidden.

"This way, madam, if you please." His voice was

level and well controlled, but his hand shook as it turned the handle.

"It looks as though you are right, Morrison," remarked Sir Harker Bellamy. He was continuing the conversation which had been broken by his springing up to pace up and down the floor. "The woman Straube, no doubt, came down here to get hold of Heath by some means—and it looks as though she has succeeded. If something had not gone seriously wrong with Heath he would have sent a message by now." He stopped to look fixedly at the younger man. "Morrison, I don't think I shall ever be able to forgive you for not telling me Straube was in London."

"It seemed Heath's show, Chief. I believe he was a bit sore over something. He wanted to pull it off on his own."

"Sore! He'll be sore right enough when I see him about this affair. Here we could have laid hands on the woman, and now——"

"We've got nothing definitely against her so far, Chief," No. 39 reminded him. "It was because I wanted first to get a line on what she was up to that I didn't report to you before. Hello—" for the door had opened. The two men watched Neale, the butler, stand aside.

"The lady with the monocle, sir," he announced, looking at Sir Harker Bellamy.

There ensued a scene of the wildest confusion. What the Secret Service Chief saw was the butler getting behind three persons—two women and a man—slamming the door hard to, and standing with his back to it.

Then he took a second look. This moment contained one of the biggest surprises of his eventful life, but he proved equal to it.

"Good-evening, Fräulein Straube," he said with cynical courtesy; "this is an unexpected pleasure, but all the more welcome on that account. Now, please do not be foolish! If you shoot——"

For with amazing quickness Gusta Straube, showing her teeth maliciously, had produced a revolver.

"Chief!" shouted No. 39 in warning.

Then the most astonishing thing of all happened. The girl, who up till now had appeared robbed of her normal senses, suddenly seized Gusta Straube's right arm. The revolver shot, which was meant for Sir Harker Bellamy's brain, became diverted to the ceiling.

"Quick, Neale," said Cicely Garrett in a decisive tone. She was now struggling with the German woman, who was cursing furiously.

"By Gad!" burst from Bellamy. "Morrison. . . ."

But No. 39 had not waited: he had recognised the man with the sabre-slash across his right cheek, and had flung himself upon him with affectionate, if embarrassing ardour. Victor Von Kroon's pessimism was amply justified. Two minutes later, a helpless prisoner, he glared across at Gusta Straube, whose wrists, like his own, had now been secured by a pair of handcuffs (produced casually by Sir Harker Bellamy from a coat-pocket), and shouted: "I told you it was too big a risk!"

The Secret Service Chief left the foaming Gusta and crossed to Cicely Garrett, who was sitting exhausted in a chair.

"Miss Garrett, I shall always be indebted to you. Not only did you save my life just now, but you enabled us by your courage and ingenuity to capture a most dangerous woman—the deadliest foe England possesses. I should explain," he added quickly, "that my name is Sir Harker Bellamy, and that I am the

Chief of the Secret Service Department for which Mr. Ian Heath works."

The girl stretched out her hand.

"Where is he? Tell me where he is!"

Bellamy shook his head.

"My dear young lady," he replied, "I only wish I knew. We came down to-night expecting to find Heath here, but were disappointed. Perhaps the story you can tell us will help."

Cicely sipped the brandy which Neale, with forethought, had brought her. She was conscious of looking a "sight"—the clothes they had dressed her in at that terrible house must have belonged to a servant—but the knowledge that these two strange men were friends and that her former enemies were now prisoners in their hands gave her confidence.

"These people, with another man named Voyce, have been after my uncle's invention," she said. "Mr. Heath has known about this for sometime, and has been staying here, helping us. . . ." Her voice faltered for some moments, but she continued bravely enough: "Last night Mr. Heath said he expected that something would happen. He had been sleeping in the summer-house in the grounds, but about ten o'clock he came to the house with a friend of his, Mr. Hartsgill."

"Who also has vanished," commented Bellamy.

"This woman knows where Mr. Hartsgill is," stated Cicely; "he was taken to the house in Tavistock where . . ." Again her voice faltered before she could carry on with her story.

"We will return to Mr. Hartsgill later, Miss Garrett," said Sir Harker Bellamy. "I should like to hear exactly what happened to you last night."

"After what Mr. Heath told me, I could not sleep. About two o'clock, my uncle—" She stopped and

loked around. "Where is my uncle?" she asked; "why is he not here?"

Bellamy cleared his throat.

"You have proved yourself so courageous, Miss Garrett, that I am going to ask you with every confidence to prepare yourself for a shock—your uncle, I am sorry to say, is dead."

"Dead? But when——?"

"Mr. Murdoch died from heart failure—you need not have any fear that he suffered—in the early hours of this morning. According to your butler, when he and Mr. Heath returned from the grounds after finding a Mr. Grinstead murdered——"

"The scream!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, Miss Cicely, that was Mr. Grinstead," put in Neale; "I heard it, too, and I rushed into the grounds just before Mr. Heath. We found Mr. Grinstead lying on the bowling-green. . . ."

"You stayed in the house, Miss Garrett, after Heath left?" asked Sir Harker Bellamy.

"Yes. And then—" She stopped to glance across at Gusta Straube, whose face was venomous.

"Someone—I did not know it was this woman then—caught hold of me. I was terrified—so much had happened in this house to frighten me—and I am afraid I didn't struggle much even before the chloroform was placed over my mouth."

"A daring move, and a characteristic one," commented Bellamy, looking at Gusta Straube. "But you were taking a big chance. I suppose you got out through a window?" There was no reply from the prisoner, and the speaker smiled. "It would be to your advantage to say where Heath is at the moment," he remarked.

The answer came from Von Kroon.

"You needn't worry about Heath—he's in the Tav-

istock Cottage Hospital recovering consciousness from a motoring accident."

Bellamy's face cleared.

"You are telling me the truth?"

"The information came from Voyce—he said he had called at the hospital himself."

"Morrison," said the Chief, turning quickly, "no doubt these people came in a car. Get into Tavistock at once and see if what this gentleman"—he paused for a moment over the word—"says is true."

"Yes, Chief; I dare say I can find the way."

Cicely dropped her hands from her face.

"I will come with you," she said.

"But you're not fit," exclaimed Bellamy. Although the girl had not completed her tale, he guessed how much she must have suffered. She stood up. Her soul became revealed in her smile. She looked as a woman looks who is going to the man she loves.

"I am perfectly fit," she replied. "Neale, I shall be bringing Mr. Heath back here if he is well enough to travel."

Working swiftly, but systematically, back in the cave on the lonely, desolate moor, Heath completed his discoveries. There were a host of papers—many of them he could see at a glance of very great importance—and these he made into a parcel.

Reaching the hill, beneath which burrowed the cave, he sat down and tried to think. But clarity of thought was very difficult. Only one fact revealed itself out of the general maze. And that fact was disturbing. Obsessed by his hatred of Voyce, everything else had passed by—even his duty to Cicely. The remembrance made him spring up: he must get to Tavistock immediately.

With the documents he had secured in the cave

packed away carefully in the borrowed car—which, owing to the darkness, he was able to find only after considerable difficulty—he tore back to Tavistock at break-neck speed.

Long before he reached the town he noticed the night sky stained a deep crimson, and wondered vaguely what building had caught fire.

Jumping out of the car at the entrance to the police station, he rushed inside.

"I want to see Inspector Dann at once!" he exclaimed.

The constable on duty pulled at his moustache.

"Would you mind telling me your name, sir?"

"My name? Heath. Where's the inspector?"

Another tug at the scrawny moustache.

"He's at a fire, sir."

"I noticed a blaze as I came into the town. But I must see the inspector at once—how do I get there?"

The policeman, after giving the information, looked at him doubtfully.

"I think you had better stop 'ere, sir—there's been a lot of inquiries about you to-night—that is, if you are the Mr. Heath in question."

But the man he addressed was gone. Now that the effects of his accident had worn off, Heath's brain was working with wonderful rapidity.

As he jumped back into the seat of the car he was piecing facts together. Fire!—uninhabited house!—Cicely! The combination turned him sick with fear.

He had gone, perhaps, two hundred yards when a small group of men caused him to slow up.

One detached himself from the others and ran forward.

"Guv'nor!" he shouted. "Guv'nor!"

The headlights of the car showed Heath it was Joe Dorrance.

THE SECRET OF THE CAVE

GREAT fires roared in the wide hearths of Doone Hall that night. A shadow still hovered over the house, for the body of Warren Murdoch lay in the impressive dignity of Death in an upstairs room; but there were those present who remained alive after passing through fearful ordeals, and the general note—how could it have been otherwise?—was one of quiet rejoicing.

Both Cicely and Jerry had given their stories. The former had told of her treatment at the hands of Gusta Straube (now being taken with Von Kroon under close escort to Tavistock Gaol) and had explained that, although Voyce had been able successfully to hypnotise her at the house with the green shutters, his "control" had weakened during the journey from Tavistock to Doone Hall, with the result that she was fully mistress of herself at the time she had made the unexpected attack on the German woman when Straube pointed her revolver at Sir Harker Bellamy.

Then Jerry Hartsgill contributed what he described as his "racy reminiscences."

"I was small game to Straube and Voyce compared with Miss Garrett and Heath," he explained. "After all, however humiliating the confession may be, I suppose it has been clearly demonstrated by now that a man who keeps fowls for a living is scarcely the type to go plunging neck high into affairs of this sort. For one thing, my glasses generally get smashed in the first act. . . ."

"Good old Jerry!" said a voice.

"Not at all," argued Hartsgill; "on the contrary, it's a case of 'good old Dorrance!' If he hadn't dropped along at the precise moment he did (giving Old Man Coincidence's arm a frightful twist in doing so) I

should by this time have been a mass of cinders. Those people thought I wasn't worth lugging over to Germany. So they tied me up again and then set fire to the house."

Heath, who was resting comfortably after labours done, looked across at the smiling Dorrance.

"And what in the name of Providence brought you to Devonshire, Joe?" he inquired.

Dorrance coughed over his cigarette.

"Well, guv'nor," he replied, "I felt I wanted a bit of a holiday—not having been away all last summer—and when I mentioned it to the missus, she said: 'What about going down to that Dartmoor place where Mr. Heath has gone?' "

"And you, Collins?"

The Scotland Yard man was equally ready with his answer.

"Due for a holiday myself, sir, I decided to come along with Dorrance. I'm a fisherman—when I can find the time."

Sir Harker Bellamy settled himself further back in his comfortable chair.

"Very fortunate for all concerned that you both did come down," he commented; "and now, as I have some private business to discuss with Mr. Heath, perhaps you wouldn't mind leaving us?" Dorrance and Collins took the hint with good grace.

Bellamy turned to his young man.

"Now, Heath—and miss nothing out, you understand."

Heath took the pipe out of his mouth, rubbed its dark, gleaming bowl on the sleeve of his coat, and placed it in his pocket.

"I'll start with Voyce," he said. "The man we knew as Philip Voyce was a very engaging person. To begin with, his real name was something entirely different

from the modest 'Voyce' he called himself on Dartmoor: it was the Count Erich Von Salkenheim."

"Sounds a mouthful," commented Jerry Hartsgill, whilst Sir Harker Bellamy muttered something beneath his breath.

"The man himself was a mouthful, as we now know. Von Salkenheim was born in the shadow of the Prussian Court, and was destined for the life of that amazing creature, the Prussian nobleman. He was to have been a big-wig of the Prussian Guards, a courtier, a swaggerer of the old type.

"But Fate intervened. When he was twenty years of age—that was a year before the war broke out—he had a severe attack of fever. As a consequence of this illness, the Count Erich Von Salkenheim became completely bald. It may sound a trivial subject, but this misfortune had the most profound effect upon the man's character and after-life.

"The Prussian idea of wit is heavy-footed and cruelly coarse. Von Salkenheim, then a subaltern in the Prussian Guards, was unmercifully chaffed about his baldness. Provoked beyond all sense of control one night at mess, he flung himself upon a senior officer and stabbed him in the heart. As may be imagined, there was the most unholy scandal—the man he had killed was a princeling and a near relative of Kaiser Bill—and Von Salkenheim was ruined. He was drummed out of his regiment, banished from his clubs, segregated generally from his kind. Even his relatives cut him off. From that day Erich Von Salkenheim became a wolf, a monstrosity . . . but I'll tell you more about that later.

"He lived like a leper, shunned by all, and then one day a certain High Personage sent for him. There was one way in which the alien from his kind could find redemption, he was told.

"Officially, Count Erich Von Salkenheim then disappeared. Actually, he joined the German Secret Service, becoming a number instead of a name.

"There is this to be said for the man we used to call the Hun," continued Heath; "he is patriotic. The Fatherland is his religion as well as his country. And from the highest downwards the German recognises authority; he has been disciplined too well ever to forget it. This explains why a nobleman like Von Salkenheim didn't kick, but accepted what he considered to be the inevitable.

"He did wonders during the war. The life he lived then developed the strain of the wolf which he had always possessed. I don't know if he ever wanted to regain his former place—most Germans would—but the treatment he had received certainly made him hate the world. It was because he was willing to take such risks, because he did things which would have appalled the average man, that he gained such high marks in the German Secret Service. I've learned all this from the man's diary which I found with his other papers. You can have them to-night, sir," he added to Bellamy.

"Good work, Heath," commented the chief, "but carry on."

"Well," continued Heath, "the war passed—and with it the class to which Von Salkenheim had previously belonged. Through various causes his money went too, and so he found himself dependent on his job. He was still a young man, of course.

"Many people imagined that with the deposing of the Monarchy and the setting up of a Republic the spirit of Germany had changed." Heath smiled. "It has changed so little that for the past two years 'Philip Voyce' has been the chief resident German spy for this part of England."

Hartsgill gasped. "So that was his game."

"There is no doubt about it," Heath said. "Plymouth and Devonport are pretty valuable places, and . . . well, 'Voyce' got hold of a good deal of information which was transmitted to Berlin. There was a heap more among his papers, but that will not be sent."

Cicely Garrett asked a question.

"After we settle at Doone Hall he concentrated on my uncle's invention?"

"Yes—to an extent."

"To an extent?"

"I will explain more fully. It comes within the regular duties of a spy like 'Voyce' to take an interest in scientists with any reputation, especially when, as was the case with Mr. Warren Murdoch, he learns that the scientist in question is working on an invention which might be extremely useful in time of war."

"How could he have learned this? My uncle took the greatest precautions."

"There are the possibilities of a hundred different ways. Let it suffice that Voyce—remember he was a persistent visitor at your house—did get to know not only that your uncle was working on a war-machine, but actually what that machine was destined to do."

"What was it destined to do?" put in Bellamy.

Heath looked at Cicely. The girl answered.

"My uncle's great hope was by means of wireless waves to force every enemy aircraft out of the air in the event of another war," she said. "The day before Professor Sapford was murdered, my uncle was delighted because, as the result of a test, he was able to stop a motor-car engine running at a distance of five miles."

"That sounds pretty useful," ejaculated Hartsgill.

"It certainly sounds so," replied Heath. "But, as

a matter of fact, endeavouring to stop aircraft by wireless has been a problem which has fascinated a great many scientists all over the world for years past. This is only natural when you consider that all future wars are practically certain to be settled in the air. There is a clever Dutchman named Van Hoosmann. He has shown experts that his machine is capable of stopping a motor-car ten miles away! Whether Mr. Murdoch's invention proves to be superior to anything else which has been tried only time can tell, of course—one hopes so, for the sake of the country—but the point I wish to make is that he was not working on something entirely new."

"Then why did that beastly woman Straube attach so much importance to it?" queried Hartsgill.

Heath turned to him with the old familiar sarcastic grin.

"My dear fat-headed ass," he said, whilst the rest of the company burst into laughter, "from Gusta Straube's point of view, importance *had* to be attached to it—Warren Murdoch was a person of international reputation; he might bring out a real winner, something marvellously good; it was a case in which they could not afford to take any chances. It was because she wished to have a hold on Murdoch that Straube tried, through Von Kroon, to kidnap Miss Garrett when she was on a recent visit to London."

Jerry Hartsgill puffed at his pipe.

"I hate to be offensive, but if Murdoch was doing such important work, why didn't he have protection?"

Whilst Sir Harker Bellamy fixed the speaker with a steely eye, Cicely replied: "I implored my uncle to do so many times, but he always refused. He felt that the loneliness of this house was sufficient protection."

"One for me!" confessed Jerry. "But why did not Voyce act before?"

"Because," answered Heath, "he was waiting for the thing to be perfected."

"And now come to to-night," said Bellamy.

"I have already explained how, when I came-to in the hospital, I had only one idea: that was to search Voyce out and kill him." Unconsciously his eyes rested on Cicely Garrett before he proceeded: "Borrowing a car at Tavistock, I arrived at Voyce's cottage just in time to see him leaving. I followed, and finally ran him to earth in a large cave."

"A cave?" The words came from Morrison.

"A cave that burrowed its way through the base of a small hill. It was there I had my scrap with him. Erich Von Salkenheim wasn't a clean fighter, but he was a brave man, and, in a way, I'm sorry he's dead."

There was a pause. Then Jerry Hartsgill asked a question which caused everyone to stiffen with interest.

"Did you discover if Voyce had any connection with the vampire business?"

"He had a very close connection," was the reply, "for he himself was the vampire."

Cicely shuddered. "I knew it!" she said. "I always felt it. But are you sure?"

"I'm as sure of it as a man can be sure of anything," Heath said. "Inside the cave I found a tiny monoplane, a make corresponding to the new British Tiger. It was so small that it might almost have been mistaken for a toy, and was painted a dull, gun-metal grey. But an examination of the engine showed that it was a Victory sixty h.p. which would probably allow a machine of that kind to travel at one hundred and eighty miles an hour. A machine like this, flying slowly round a house at night, with the wheels tucked up inside the fuselage, would look very much like what one would imagine a vampire——"

"Sounds far-fetched, old chap," cut in Morrison. "What about the sound of the engine?"

"The engine was fitted with a silencer. Any more questions?"

"Yes. If Voyce had used this cave for a hangar, how could he land at night?" This from Bellamy.

"Easily! A pal of mine has flown many times in a Baby Bat—a much bigger machine than the one Voyce used—and he has often told me he can land on a space of a hundred and fifty square yards. Outside the cave was a stretch of fairly level ground measuring, I should estimate, two hundred yards square. That's speaking roughly, of course."

Morrison still shook his head, but Hartsgill turned to him angrily.

"Scoff! But that's the solution of the mystery, though—I saw the darned thing myself, so I ought to know. And you did too, didn't you, Heath?"

"I did—and I don't mind admitting I was never in such a funk in my life."

"But how could the fellow see to land in the dead of night without any light?"

"He did have light. Inside the cave I found a battery of six volts and twenty amps. There was a wire attached leading outside. On very dark nights a light hidden in the grass would only be seen by anyone vertically above. I admit the idea did not occur to me, but it was one of those obvious things which never strike you—until you know. Voyce, as a German spy, had a tremendously large area over which to operate. He went frequently to Portsmouth, for instance. During the war he became an expert airman . . . now do you see? If you don't, try to look at it from Voyce's point of view. In the first place, he had a perfectly legitimate use for this specially constructed monoplane. Remember, he had a huge area to cover

and he could travel by night. Moreover, being a trained airman, all other means of locomotion probably palled on him—they weren't fast enough. So much for that.

"As regards his scheme for impersonating the supposed vampire haunting Doone Hall, now that Grinstead is dead, we shall never know the truth. But my guess is that he got to know Grinstead—who was a thorough rogue: the reason he made that midnight call on Neale was because he was afraid a warrant was out for his arrest for embezzling clients' money—and Grinstead told him of the legend. Grinstead evidently wanted both Miss Garrett and her uncle to believe in this bogey story, but it was for an entirely different reason that Voyce lent substance to the superstition. So far as such a man can be fond of anyone he was in love with Miss Garrett."

"He had a queer way of showing it," said Hartsgill.

"Granted. But you must recall that he was a German—and a Prussian. He was absolutely abnormal; moreover, it satisfied some perverse sense to put terror into people's souls. My belief is that he used to fly round the house in the hope that Miss Garrett would appeal to him for help. It's an unthinkable state of mind for any of us here, but——"

"But perfectly understandable," growled Sir Harker Bellamy, "to anyone who has studied the mental make-up of people like Von Salkenheim. You have a larger allowance of brains than I had credited you with, Heath; is there anything else?"

"I have very little more to add, sir. But this is also clear; the man we have been talking about was a 'killer.' It's not a very pleasant subject to discuss, but you'll forgive me, I'm sure?" he asked, looking at Cicely. "Voyce had the blood-lust, the murder-craze. His was a warped mind. There was such a strong

strain of abnormality in him that every now and then he ran amok. That was why he killed Sapford, poor fellow; and that was the reason when, worked up to murder Warren Murdoch, he could not stay his hand when he found Grinstead confronting him on the last night but one he roamed abroad."

"Why the holes in the throat?" inquired Morrison.

"A fantastic touch to lend credence to the vampire superstition. In his way the man was an artist."

"I still don't understand why Voyce should have wished to kill my uncle," said Cicely.

"We do not know for certain that he did intend to kill him. There is a possibility that the reason he killed Grinstead was because he was incensed at his plan with regard to Warren Murdoch having gone astray. He may have intended merely to have taken the inventor away with him. I know this sounds a fantastic proceeding when he could have obtained the same result in a much easier way—and by daylight—but I am not an alienist. I am merely narrating facts. If any of you," turning to the others, "want to understand the inner working of a mind as diseased and distorted as was 'Philip Voyce's,' then you had better read one of the works of the German authorities on the subject."

"There is just one other thing I should like to know," said Cicely; "who was the man with half a face I met in the corridor outside the laboratory that night?"

"Voyce. When I paid my first visit to his cottage, I discovered in his bedroom a make-up box such as actors use. It would be easy for a man skilled in make-up to 'black-out' half his face and accentuate the other-half. In a poor light it might certainly appear that such a man only did possess half a normal face. Voyce was staying at the Hall that particular night,

wasn't he? He meant to have a prowl round, but took precautions beforehand. To adopt such a 'disguise' was characteristic, it seems to me, of the fellow's peculiar mind, and evidence of his cruel streak."

"Altogether a most interesting story," said Sir Harker Bellamy, rising. "I hope I shall sleep well after hearing it."

THE SLEEPING JOSS

It was the following afternoon. Doone Hall had been cleared of visitors. With the papers that Ian Heath had taken out of Voyce's monoplane safely locked in his bag, Sir Harker Bellamy had caught the first train back to Town. It was necessary, he said, for him to consult with the authorities. In the meantime, Heath was left in charge. Joe Dorrance, muttering something cryptic about the price now being 5—1 *on*, had started off to walk across the Moor with his brother-in-law after breakfast, and Jerry Hartsgill had professed a sudden and overwhelming interest in his "cursed hens." Ian and Cicely were alone.

The girl rose, dragging Heath after her.

"I want to see that the invention is safe," she said. "Come along upstairs." Humorously protesting, he followed her.

Cicely paused, pointing downwards.

"It was one of these boards that uncle raised," she said. A moment's further reflection brought the statement: "Yes, I remember now—it was the second."

Ian Heath dropped to his knees.

"It's loose right enough," he declared. The board was prised up, and, following Cicely's instructions, the invention was brought to light.

Cicely gave a sigh.

"I can't realize it is all over—all the distress, fear——"

"It isn't!" answered a voice below her.

"Ian!"

"I say, old girl, there's something else here," said Heath. He was still on all fours, both arms hidden beneath the floorboards.

"Something else?" She sank to her knees by his side.

"Yes . . . ah!" There was a faint whirring sound, followed by a click.

"There's another secret hiding-place," declared Heath, now stretched full length in order to get a better view; "excuse me doing an imitation of a famished seal." Wriggling forward, his head and shoulders disappeared.

"What is it?" asked the girl. She was a-bubble with excitement.

"I—don't—know—yet." Heath apparently was finding speaking difficult. A sneeze followed the words, and after that a muttered exclamation which Cicely could not catch. And after that again an excited if smothered: "By Jove!"

"Oh, what it is?" cried Cicely, tortured beyond endurance.

The shoulders and head of Ian Heath slowly reappeared. Then his arms, and after that his hands. The latter were gripped tightly round a black canvas case.

"What is it?" almost screamed Cicely. She felt her nerves would not stand any further grim discoveries in Doone Hall.

Heath rose to a sitting position.

"I can't imagine it's anything very terrible," he replied. "Come and sit down here." He patted the floor-

boards by his side before pulling a knife out of his pocket. With this he ripped the side of the canvas package open.

The next moment both had uttered an exclamation of utter astonishment. Heath tore the remainder of the covering away, and then, setting the thing on the floor in front of him, he whistled explosively.

"Well, I'm——"

"Never mind me," entreated his companion. "What is it—a god?"

Heath picked up his "find." It was an image, apparently of gold, measuring about four feet in height.

"Yes," he replied, "it looks like a Chinese joss, or god." They remained spellbound in admiration of the craftsmanship for a few minutes. Then, acting on a sudden inspiration, Heath turned the image upside down. The result was surprising: the eyelids of the joss, which before had been closed, opened——

"Oh!" cried Cicely, lost in ecstasy; "the eyes! Look at the eyes!"

Heath whistled afresh.

"My dear," he said, "I congratulate you. You are a very rich woman. The eyes of the joss are a pair of the most marvellous rubies. I am no judge of precious stones, but I should say that the value of these rubies is enormous. And the joss itself is unique; many a wealthy collector would probably give you a fortune for it."

"But is it mine? Have I any real claim on it?"

Heath put an arm around her.

"Certainly it's yours—and you have the very soundest of claims to it! When your uncle died, Doone Hall passed to you. Owning the house, everything discovered in it also becomes yours."

"But where did it come from? Who brought it here?"

"It has probably been here for umpteen years—hidden away by one of the Coxonfields; loot, no doubt, from travels in the East. No one knew about it unless"—he stopped—"it was Grinstead."

Cicely's body shook with a little spasm of excitement.

"Yes, no doubt this is what Grinstead was after," she said. "Don't you remember what Neale told us? How Grinstead said there was something in the house which belonged to him; how he hinted that it was hidden in a secret place, and how he wanted Neale to fetch him a book from the library—?" She broke off. "No wonder Neale was not able to find that book. My uncle had destroyed it. He had looked through the book, which was a history of Doone Hall, had found this secret hiding-place described, and then burned the book in case anyone else should discover where he had placed his invention."

"You've just about hit it," Heath told her. "Grinstead could not have known about the sleeping joss until quite recently, however, or surely he would have made a search for it before you and your uncle entered into possession."

"We shall never know the truth about that, Ian. He may have known something very valuable was hidden somewhere in the house, but until the extremity came, he was content to let it remain."

"No, with all due respect, I don't think you are right there. Grinstead, absolutely up against things, and desperate, undoubtedly came here the night he was accidentally murdered with the intention of searching for this joss—it is a curious fact in human nature that a man of Moses Grinstead's type is often the most reckless when pushed to it—but he could have only recently got to know of the treasure; perhaps some old papers of the Coxonfield family which he had not

studied carefully enough before gave him a hint. However, what does it matter? This," lifting up the joss and studying it again, "is undoubtedly yours now, and there's an end of it. My dear," he added in another tone, "I did think of asking you to marry me, but, dash it, my pride won't let me propose to a girl who may be worth £50,000!"

"Is it as valuable as that?" she asked.

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

"Then I have already settled what to do. If it is decided that the joss really comes to me as my uncle's next of kin, I shall have it sold, and——"

"And—what?" questioned Heath.

She smiled up into his face.

"I intend to pension off a certain person who is very dear to me. He is far too fond of risking his life. . . . Ian!" she broke off suddenly, "how would you like a trip round the world? £50,000 ought to be sufficient for two tickets."

Ian Heath moved forward.

"Cicely," he said, in a tone that brought the colour mounting to her brow, "do you know what I am going to do? I'm going to kiss you."

She lifted her face bravely.

"My dear," she replied, "you've waited far too long already. . . !"

THE END